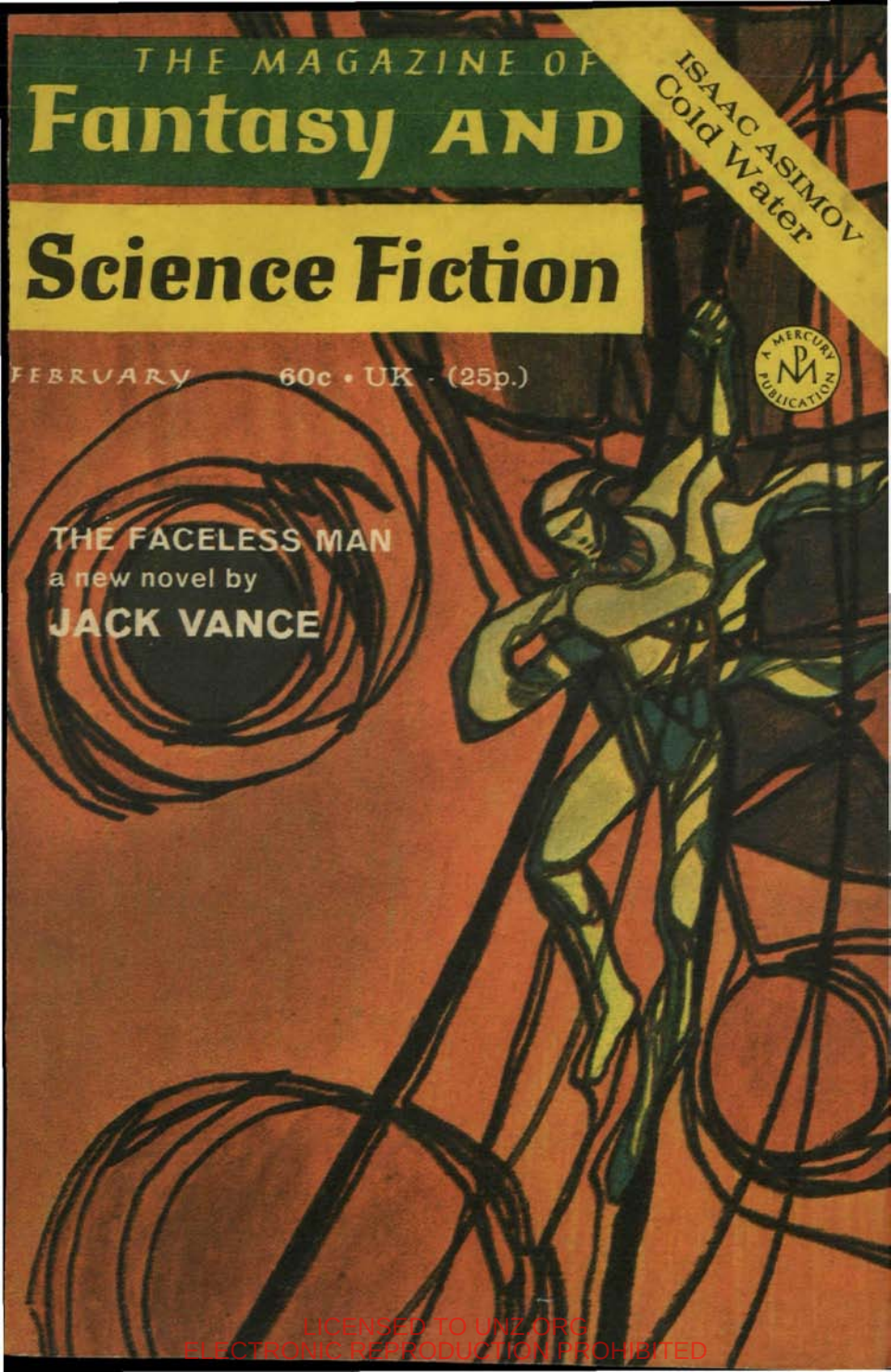

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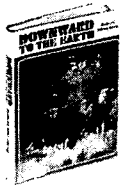

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The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction, Volume 40, No. 2, Whole No. 237, Feb. 1971. Published monthly by Mercury Press, Inc., at 60¢ a copy. Annual subscription $7.00; $7.50 in Canada and Mexico, $8.00 in all other countries. Postmaster: send Form 3579 to Fantasy & Science Fiction, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Publication office, Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753. Editorial submissions should be sent to 347 East 53rd St., New York, N.Y. 10022. Second Class postage pending at Cornwall, Conn. 06753 and at additional mailing offices. Printed in U.S.A. *© 1970 by Mercury Press, Inc. All rights, including translations into other languages, reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelopes; the Publisher assumes no responsibility for return of unsolicited manuscripts.*

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Jack Vance's talent is a very special one, as readers of his Cugel the clever series (published here in 1966) or of THE DYING EARTH *or, more recently,* EMPHYRIO, *will know. Joanna Russ has described it in part as a "combination of strange things seeming familiar and familiar things suddenly becoming strange, which is the finest in the world." (Books, Jan. 1970) His new novel, one of Mr. Vance's best, is about a land called Shant, which is under the rule of the mysterious Faceless Man, whose justice adheres to one simple principle: He who breaks the law, dies.*

THE FACELESS MAN

by Jack Vance

(1st of 2 parts)

1

AT THE AGE OF NINE MUR heard a man in his mother's rest cottage call out a curse in the name of the Faceless Man. Later, after the man had gone his way, Mur put a question to his mother. "Is the Faceless Man real?"

"He is real, indeed," replied Eathre.

Mur considered the matter for a period, then asked, "How does he eat or smell or talk?"

Eathre, in her calm voice, replied, "I suppose one way or another he manages."

"It would be interesting to watch," said Mur.

"No doubt."

"Have you ever seen him?"

Eathre shook her head. "The Faceless Man never troubles the Chilites, so you need not concern yourself for the Faceless Man." She added as a musing afterthought: "For better or worse, such is the case."

Mur, a child thin and somber, knit the black brows which had come as a legacy from his unknown blood-father. "Why should such a case be better? Or worse?"

Eathre's lips twitched. "If a person breaks Chilite law, the Ecclesiarchs punish him. If he runs away, the Faceless Man takes his head." Eathre's hand went to her torc, a mannerism common to all the folk of Shant. "If you obey Chilite law, you need never fear the loss of your head. This is the 'better'. In such a case, however, you are a Chilite, and this is the 'worse'."

Mur said no more. The remarks

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were unsettling. Were his soul-father to hear, Eathre would incur at least a reprimand. She might be transferred to the tannery and Mur's world would be shattered. The time left him 'on mother's milk' (to use the Chilite idiom) was short enough in any event: three or four years . . . A wayfarer entered the cottage. Eathre put a garland of flowers around her brow and poured a goblet of wine.

Mur went to sit across the way, in the shade of the great rhododendrons. To some such encounter he owed his existence, so he was aware; an Original Guilt which he must expiate when he became a Chilite Pure Boy. The whole process taxed his mind. Eathre had borne three children. Delamber, a girl of sixteen, already maintained a cottage at the west end of the Way. The third child, born two years after Mur, had been adjudged defective and drowned in the tannery sump, with prejudice toward Eathre, sexual eccentricity being held the cause of fetal defects.

Mur stirred himself. His plot of fiber-trees wanted tending. If the bobbins are allowed to run slack the thread became lumpy and coarse.

He worked for two hours and returned to find the traveler departed. Eathre set out bread and soup for his lunch. As Mur ate he asked the question which all morning had been tugging at a corner of his mind. "Glynet's son Neech resembles his soul-father, but I do not; isn't this strange?"

Eathre paused for knowledge to well up into her mind: a wonderful elemental process like the flowering of trees or juice oozing from bruised fruit. "Neither you nor Neech have blood-connection with your soul-father, nor any other Chilite. They have no knowledge of real women. Your blood-father was a wanderer, a music-maker, one of those who travel alone." She looked for a moment out the window. "I was sorry when he went his way."

"Where did he go?"

Eathre shook her head. "Such as Dystar wander all the cantons of Shant."

"And you could not go with him?"

"Not while Osso holds my indenture."

Mur ate his soup in thoughtful silence.

Into the cottage came Delamber, with a cloak over her striped gown of green and blue. Like Mur, she was slender and serious; like her mother she was tall and as softly even as a flowing river. She sank into a chair. "Already I am tired; I have had three musicians from the camp. The first was drunk and gave me his musical instrument, a khitan. Look at it! The last was most difficult, and full of talk as well. He told me of certain barbarians, the

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Roguskhoi, great drunkards and great lechers. Have you heard of them?"

"Yes," said Eathre. "Their lust is said to be extraordinary, from which no woman is safe, nor do they pay."

"Why doesn't the Faceless Man drive them off?" asked Mur, eyeing the khitan.

"Wild folk wear no torcs; the Faceless Man can't deal with them. In any event they have been beaten back and are no longer considered a threat."

"I am glad to hear this," said Delamber with a shudder. "I cannot abide the thought of so much cruelty . . . Mur, you may take the khitan; use it for your toy. It has no value to me."

2

On a cool morning in the fall of the year a Pure Boy came down to the boundary and called for Mur. "Your soul-father will see you at noon, at the portal to the under-room. Cleanse yourself well."

With leaden motions Mur bathed, dressed in a clean smock; Eathre watched from the far side of the room, not wishing to contribute woman-taint to Mur's nervousness.

At last she could not restrain herself and came to brush down his stubborn black hair. "Remember, he only wants to gauge your growth, and speak to you of Chilite doctrine. There is nothing to fear."

"That may be so," said Mur. "Still, I am afraid."

"Nonsense," said Eathre decidedly. "You are not afraid; you are the brave Mur. Listen carefully, obey exactly, answer cautious words to his questions, do nothing eccentric."

At the cottage door she brought an ember from the fire and blew smoke through Mur's clothes and hair, so at least not to prejudice Osso with woman-taint.

Ten minutes before noon Mur set out for the temple, taut with foreboding. The road seemed a lonely place; white dust rose in his footsteps to eddy in the lavender sunlight. Above bulked the temple, a set of squat convex cylinders, gradually filling the sky. With the flow of cool air down the hill came the reek of stale galga.

Mur circled the base of the temple to a stall-like half-room, open to the sky, a place known as the under-room, now empty. Mur arranged himself primly by the wall and waited.

Time passed. The suns climbed the sky, the blaze of white Sasetta passing across the plum-red haunch of Ezeletta, blue Zael on the roundabout: three dwarf stars dancing through space like fireflies.

Mur mused across the countryside; he could see far, far, far, in all directions: west to Canton

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Seamus, north to Shimrod Forest, and beyond to Canton Ferriy where the folk made ironweb on their red hillsides . . .

A sound startled him. He jerked around to find Osso frowning down from a high pulpit. Mur had made a poor beginning; rather than waiting in a crouch of timorous reverence, here he stood gazing over the panorama.

For a minute or longer Osso looked down at Mur, who stared back in fascination. Osso spoke in a voice of sepulchral gravity: "Have the girls made ignoble play with you?"

The language was ambiguous; Mur understood the semantic content. He swallowed harder, recalling incidents which might be construed as ignoble play. He said, "No, never."

"Have you suggested or initiated vile concatenations with the female girls?"

"No," quavered Mur. "Never."

Osso gave a curt nod. "From your present age forward you must take care. You will shortly become a Pure Boy, thereafter a Chilite. Do not complicate the already rigorous rituals."

Mur gave an acquiescent mumble.

"You can expedite your passage into the temple," spoke Osso. "Devour no greasy food, drink no syrups nor baklavy. The bond between child and mother is strong; now is the time to start the solvent process. Gently disengage yourself. When your mother offers sweetmeats or attempts fond caresses, you must say, 'Madam, I am on the verge of purification; please do not add to the rigors I must endure.' Is this clear?"

"Yes, soul-father."

"You must start to forge the strongest of all bonds, the holy link to the temple. Galexis, the nervous essence, corresponds to female women as the candy of unmel to tannery sludge; you will learn more of this. Meanwhile, be firm with yourself. Direct your mind from the assault of the brute appetite; find some abstract occupation upon which to focus your attention. I tied heraldic knots with imaginary cords; another Ecclesiarch, a Six-Spasm, memorized prime numbers. There are many such occupations to which you can put your mind."

"I know just the thing," said Mur with something like enthusiasm. "I will consider musical sounds."

"Use whatever device you find helpful," said Osso. "So then, be guided. I can counsel, but progress must be made by yourself. Have you given thought to your Male-name?"

"Not yet, soul-father."

"It is not too early to do so. A proper name can be inspirational and exalting. In due course I will offer a list of suggestions; but for today, that is all."

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When Mur returned to the cottage, Eathre was drinking tea. Mur thought that she seemed tired and wan. She asked, "How went the meeting with soul-father Osso?"

Mur grimaced. "He told me to practice purity. I am not to play with girls."

Eathre silently sipped her tea.

"He told me to curb my appetites. I am also to take a name."

Eathre acquiesced. "You are old enough to name yourself a name. What will it be?"

Mur gave a glum shrug. "Soul-father will send me down a list."

"He did the same for Glynet's son Neech."

"Did Neech take a name?"

"He called himself Geacles Vonoble."

"Hmf. And who were they?"

Eathre said tonelessly, "Geacles was the architect of the temple; Vonoble composed the Achiliadnid Dithyrambs."

"Hmf. So I must call fat Neech Geacles."

"That is now his name."

Four days later a Pure Boy pushed a long stick across the boundary with a paper in its cleft end. "A missive from Great Male Osso."

Mur took the paper into the cottage, and puzzled out the sense of the characters, with occasional help from Eathre. His face grew longer and longer as he read: "Bougozonie, the Seven-Spasm Ecclesiarch. Narth Homank, who ate but one nut and one berry each day. Higajou, who reorganized Pure Boy training. Faman Cocile, who allowed himself to be gelded by Shimrod Forest bandits rather than alter his creed of nonviolence and peace. Borgad Polveitch who denounced the Ambisexual Heresy . . ." At last Mur put aside the paper.

"What is your selection?" asked Eathre.

"I can't make up my mind."

Three months later Mur was summoned to a second conference with his soul-father at the underroom. Osso again advised Mur on particularities of conduct. "It is not too early to begin carrying yourself in the style of a Pure Boy. Each day put aside one adjunct of your old child's life. Study the child's Principary, with which you will be supplied. You have selected a name for yourself?"

"Yes," said Mur.

"And what is your Male-name to be?"

"I now call myself Gastel Etzwane."

"Gastel Etzwane! Where in the name of everything extraordinary did you derive this nomenclature?"

Mur spoke placatingly, "Well—naturally I considered your suggestions, but I thought I would like to be someone differ-

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ent. A man who passed along Rhododendron Way gave me a book called *Heroes of Old Shant,* and here I found my names."

"And who is Gastel? And who is Etzwane?"

Mur, or Gastel Etzwane, as was now his name, looked uncertainly up at his soul-father, in whom he had expected familiarity with these magic personalities. "Gastel built a great glider of withe and web, and launched himself from Mount Haghead, intending to fly the breadth of Shant, but when he came to Cape Merse, rather than alighting, he sailed on over the Purple Ocean toward Caraz*, and was never seen again . . . Etzwane was the greatest musician ever to wander Shant."

Osso was silent for half a minute, seeking words. At last he spoke, in ponderous opprobrium: "A crazy aeronaut and a tune-twanger: these are then your exemplars. I have failed to inculcate in you the proper ideals. I have been remiss, and it is clear that I must, in your case, exert myself more energetically. Your name is not to be Gaswane Etzel, or whatever. It shall be Faman Bougozonie, whose attributes are immeasurably more relevant and inspiring. That is all for today."

Caraz: (1) A color, mottled of black, maroon, plum, with a dusting or sheen of silver-gray; symbolical of chaos and pain, macabre events in general. (2) The largest of Durdane's three continents.

Mur—he refused to think of himself as Faman Bougozonie—returned downslope, past the tannery, where he loitered to watch the old women at their tasks, then slowly proceeded home.

Eathre asked, "Well, then, and how did it go today?"

Mur said, "I told him my name was Gastel Etzwane; he said, no, it was Faman Bougozonie."

Eathre laughed, and Mur looked at her in melancholy accusation.

Eathre became sober. She said, "A name means nothing; let him call you what he wants. You'll quickly get used to it. And to the life of a Chilite."

Mur turned away. He brought out the khitan and touched the strings. After a few moments he attempted a melody, with accents from the rattle-box. Eathre listened approvingly, but presently Mur halted and inspected the instrument with disfavor. "I know so little, so few tunes. I can't strike the side-strings or use the brilliancy buttons or the slurs."

"Skill doesn't come easily," said Eathre. "Patience, patience . . ."

3

At the age of twelve Mur, Faman Bougozonie, Gastel Etzwane—the names mingled in his mind—underwent Purification. In company with three other boys, Geacles, Morlark and Illan, he

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was shorn skin-bald, then washed in the bitterly cold water of the sacred stream which welled up below the temple. After the first submersion the boys lathered themselves with aromatic tincture, and once again submitted themselves to the bone-wrenching chill. Clammy, naked, shivering, the boys marched into a room heavy with the smoke of burning agapanthus. From holes in the stone floor steam arose; in a mixture of steam and smoke the boys gasped, sweated, coughed, and presently began to totter. One by one they stumbled to the floor; when the doors opened they barely were able to raise their heads.

The voice of the Chilite supervising the purification rang through the air: "To your feet, back to the clean water! Are you of such soft fiber? Let me see who wants to make a Chilite of himself!"

Mur struggled erect. One other boy, Geacles Vonoble, did likewise, and swaying, clutched at Mur. Both fell. Mur brought himself once more erect, and helped Geacles to his feet. Geacles pushed Mur aside and loped splayfooted to the pool. Mur stood gazing with numb horror at the other two boys. Morlark lay with eyes bulging, a trickle of blood leaking from his mouth. Illan seemed unable to control his movements. Mur leaned forward, but the bland voice of the monstrator halted him. "To the pool, as fast as possible! You are being watched and gauged."

Mur tottered to the pool and gave himself to the chill. His skin felt dead; his arms and legs were heavy and stiff as iron posts. An inch at a time he dragged himself up on the stone, and somehow stumbled along a white-tiled passage into a chamber lined with benches. Here sat Geacles, swathed in a white robe, well satisfied with himself.

The monstrator tossed a similar robe to Mur. "Your skins are flushed of stain; for the first time since the necessary depravity of birth you are clean. Attention then to Argument One of the Chilite Procourse! Man enters the world through the genital portal; an original taint which by cleansings and attitudes the Chilite casts aside, like a serpent molting a skin, but which ordinary men carry like a stinking incubus all the way to their graves. Drink!" He handed each boy a beaker of thick liquid; they drank. "Your first purge . . ."

Mur spent three days in a cell, with cold sacred water for sustenance. At the end of this time he was required to enter the sacred well, lather himself with tincture and rinse. More dead than alive he crept out into the sunlight a Pure Boy.

The monstrator gave him succinct instructions. "I need not de-

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tail the strictures; you are familiar with them. If you taint yourself you must undergo a new purification. I advise against it. Osso Higajou is your soul-father and not the least rigorous of the Chilites. He deplores the most trivial contact with the Female Principle. I have known him to berate a Pure Boy for enjoying the fragrance of a flower. 'The flower is a female procreative organ,'—so Great Male Osso exclaimed—'and there you stand with your nose pushed into it.' Trust Osso Higajou to guide you in the Rotes. Think purity, live purity, and make sure that Great Male Osso recognizes your purity! So now—to your bay in the lower compound. You will find there wafers and porridge. Eat in moderation; tonight meditate."

Days passed, and then a week. One warm afternoon the Pure Boys sat on benches in the undertemple bay, occupied at their studies. Mur held a copy of the Analytical Catechism, but his attention was fixed across the landscape. He seemed distrait. Geacles raised his head, wondering what went on in Mur's mind. Why did his fingers twitch, why did he frown so intently? . . . Mur gave a peculiar jerk, as if at a message from his subconscious. He rose to his feet and oblivious as a somnambulist departed the chamber.

Geacles heaved himself from his couch and went to peer after Mur. Was he off to tend his silk? Conceivably. But again—Mur's gait was not that of a truly consecrated Pure Boy. Geacles watched as Mur, now marching purposefully, took the path to the north. Toward his plot of fiber-trees, thought Geacles with a sniff. Mur, or rather Faman Bougozonie, had always been assiduous with his trees. Still: why the backward glance into the chamber? Geacles rubbed his pale cheeks. Interesting, interesting. To learn he must look, with his round, yellow-brown eyes; to look, he must move himself within range of vision. After all, there was no reason why he should not tend his own silk; it had been sorely neglected over the last few weeks. Geacles disliked the routine of winding bobbins, weeding, propping branches, drawing down new strands; but now duty offered a pretext upon which he might follow Mur without fear of challenge.

Geacles set off along one of the paths which curved around the parched hillside. He tried to contrive a sedate and purposeful gait and simultaneously maintain stealth, no mean feat; had Mur been other than lost in his brooding, Geacles would have been forced to relinquish one or the other of his attitudes.

But Mur went unheeding down into the silk-tree brake and Geacles followed.

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From the age of eight Mur had tended eighteen full-size trees, with over a hundred bobbins. He knew the angle of each twig, the cast of each leaf, the sap which each branch might be expected to provide. Each bobbin had its idiosyncrasy: in some, if the glass spring were wound too tightly, the ratchet would jam; others refused to turn unless tilted; a few worked flawlessly, and these Mur used under the highest beads.

Geacles watched from concealment while Mur made the rounds of his bobbins, winding the mechanisms, replacing full spools with empty ones, pinching suckers from the trunks. A dozen branches had gone dry; Mur cut into fresh shoots. The beads of sap oozed forth; Mur drew down filaments, which hardened at once into strands of silk. Mur attached the ends to bobbins, assured himself that the rotating spools drew down the strands at a steady rate. Geacles watched in glum disappointment; Mur's conduct was that of an industrious, innocent and responsible Pure Boy.

Mur began to move at purposeful speed, as if he were anxious to finish. Geacles ducked back out of sight as Mur stepped forward to make a careful scrutiny of the hillside. Geacles grinned; Mur's conduct was no longer that of an innocent Pure Boy.

Mur set off downhill, moving so quickly that Geacles was hard-put to follow. Mur reached the path which skirted the boundary behind Rhododendron Way and set off to the east. Geacles was now at something of a disadvantage. If he followed along the path, he must disclose himself. He darted through the berry patch, blundering into a nettle patch. Cursing and hissing, he took shelter among the rhododendrons. Mur was well along the path, almost out of sight. Geacles followed crouching, dodging, running. He gained a spot where he could look along the path. Mur was nowhere to be seen. Geacles deliberated a moment, then pushed down into Rhododendron Way, highly questionable territory for a Pure Boy, not precisely tainted but still ground to be walked on gingerly. No Mur. Puzzled now, Geacles returned to the path. Where was Mur? Had he gone into one of the cottages? Geacles licked his lips in horror, trotted along the path toward the cottage of Eathre. He paused to listen: Eathre was entertaining a musician. But where was Mur? Geacles looked this way and that. Surely not in the cottage with his mother and the musician. Geacles walked past, angry and uncomfortable. In some unfathomable manner Mur had evaded him . . . . The music halted, then after a few runs and arpeggios, began again. It seemed to be coming not from the cottage but the garden. Geacles crept close, peered

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through the foliage . . . He turned. Fleetly, soundlessly, bounding like a hare, Geacles ran up the hill toward the temple. Eathre, glancing from her window, saw him go.

Fifteen minutes passed. Down the hill on long, point-footed strides came Great Male Osso, followed by two other Chilites, all three red-eyed from their galga-induced spasms. At the back came Geacles. The group marched down into Rhododendron Way.

At Eathre's cottage the group halted. The midday air was warm; the three suns rolled overhead projecting triple images in the dust of the road. No sound could be heard but the drone of the spiral-bugs in the foliage and a far thumping from the tannery.

Standing well back from the door, Osso signaled to a nearby child. "Summon forth the woman Eathre."

The child timidly went around to the back of Eathre's cottage. A moment later the door opened; Eathre looked forth. She stood quietly, passive but alert.

Great Male Osso demanded, "The Pure Boy Faman Bougozonie—is he here?"

"He is not here."

"Where is he?"

"So I should guess, elsewhere."

Geacles darted behind the cottage, where he signaled. The Chilites, clutching their robes to themselves, went to look. Geacles pointed in excitement. "He sat on yonder bench. The woman evades."

Osso spoke portentously, "Woman, is this true?"

"Why should he not sit there? The bench does him no taint."

"Are you a keen judge of this? Where is the boy?"

"I don't know."

Osso turned to Geacles. "Try the Pure Boy quarters. Fetch him here."

With great zeal Geacles sprang away, arms and legs pumping. He returned in five minutes, grinning and panting like a dog. "He is coming, he comes."

Mur stepped slowly forth into the road.

Osso stood back. Mur, wide-eyed and somewhat pale, asked, "Why did you wish to see me, soul-father?"

"I call to your attention," said Osso, "the sorry fact that you came here mother-milking and playing idle music."

"With utmost respect, soul-father, you have been misled."

"There is the witness!"

Mur looked toward Geacles. "He has not told the truth."

"Did you not sit on this bench, a woman's thing? Did you not take a musical instrument from this woman's hand? You are female-foul, and not on good footing."

"The bench, soul-father, is from outside the under-temple.

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Notice, it stands away from the cottage, across the garden boundary. The khitan is my own property. Before my rite I took it into the temple and passed it through agapanthus smoke; you can still smell the reek. Since then, it has been kept in the play-hut I built with my own hands yonder; there it is now. I am guilty of no defilement whatever."

Osso looked blinking up at the sky while he gathered his thoughts. He was being made ridiculous by two Pure Boys. Faman Bougozonie with great cleverness had avoided any act of flagrant defilement, but this very cleverness indicated corruption . . . Geacles Vonoble, while inaccurate in his assertions, had correctly diagnosed impurity. If anything was certain, it was that Faman Bougozonie's sophistries should not put truth and orthodoxy to rout. Osso said, "This seems a peculiar retreat for a Pure Boy, the yard behind his mother's cottage."

"It seemed as good as any other, soul-father, and here at least I would disturb no one while I meditated."

"Meditated?" croaked Osso. "Playing jigs and kestrels while the other Pure Boys performed their devotions?"

"No, soul-father, the music helped fix my thoughts, exactly as you recommended."

"What? You claim that I recommended such an affair?"

"Yes, soul-father. You declared that you found the construction of imaginary knots helpful to your austerities, and permitted that I use musical tones to the same end."

Osso stood back. The other two Chilites and Geacles looked at him expectantly. Osso said, "I envisioned different tones, in a different environment. Your conduct stinks of secularity! And, woman, what of you? Are you slack-witted? Surely you must know such conduct to be incorrect?"

"I hoped, Great Male, that the music would assist him in his future life."

Osso chuckled. "The mother of a freak, the mother of Pure Boy Faman. What a pair! You shall spawn no more such prodigies. To the tannery." Osso swung around, pointed a finger at Mur. "As for you, we shall test the erudition you claim to have achieved."

"Soul-father, if you please, I only aspire to erudition!" cried Mur, but Osso already had turned away. Mur looked toward Eathre, who gave him a smiling shrug and went into the cottage. Mur whirled toward Geacles, but the Chilites stood in his way. "To the temple with you; did you not hear your soul-father?"

Mur marched up the path to the temple. He went to his bay. Geacles followed and went to his own alcove where he sat looking across the room at Mur.

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An hour passed; a chime sounded. The Pure Boys trooped into the refectory. Mur hesitated, and turned a look back over the landscape, across road and cottages and off into the purple distances.

Geacles was watching. Mur heaved a sigh and went down the passage toward the refectory.

At the entrance stood the Chilite monstrator. He signaled Mur aside. "This way."

He led Mur around the temple, to a disused under-chamber. He swung open an old timber door and signaled Mur to enter. Holding high a glow-bulb, the monstrator led the way along a passage rich with the reek of old galga fume, into a large circular chamber, at the very heart of the temple. The limestone walls were dank and gave off the odor of mold; the floor was dark brick. From the ceiling hung a single light-globe. "What is this place?" Mur quavered.

"It is a place of solitary study, where you will remain prior to your repurification."

"Repurification!" cried Mur. "But I am not defiled."

"Come, come," said the monstrator. "Why dissemble? Do you believe you can outwit your soul-father Osso, or myself for that matter? If you did not physically defile yourself, you committed a hundred acts of spiritual defilement." He waited, but Mur was silent. "Notice," the monstrator went on, "there are books on the table yonder: Doctrines and Exclamations, an Analytical Catechism. These will give you comfort and wise counsel."

Mur scowled around the chamber. "How long must I stay here?"

"A proper time. In the cabinet is food and drink; to the side is a sump. Now a final word: submit, and all will be well. Do you hear?"

"Monstrator, I hear."

"Life is a choice of paths. Make sure you choose correctly, because you may never return to choose again. Call for Galexis!"

The monstrator departed into the corridor. Mur looked after him, half of a mind to follow . . . But he had been brought here to meditate; if he departed, he would incur something worse than repurification.

He listened. Nothing but the secret murmur of underground places. He went to stand in the gap and peered down the corridor. Surely someone watched. Or an alarm or a trap had been set. If he tried to follow the monstrator, he might encounter something unpleasant . . . "Submit," the monstrator had told him. "Submit, and all will be well."

Submission might well be the wisest course.

Soberly Mur turned away from the opening. He went to look at the table and seating himself ex-

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amined the books. The Doctrines were hand-printed in purple ink on alternate sheets of red and green paper; they were inordinately difficult to read and contained many strange expressions. Nonetheless, thought Mur, it would be wise to study them carefully. The Exclamations, to be uttered during nocturnal worship, were not quite so important, adding only elegance, as they did, to the spasms.

Mur recalled that he had eaten no lunch and jumping up went to the cabinet. He found a dozen packets of dried berries: enough to nourish him for as many days, or even longer, were he frugal, as common sense dictated. Three dark-green glass jugs held ample water. There was no cot or couch; he must sleep on the bench.

Mur stared around the dank walls. Were there other entrances? He made a circuit of the room, testing the damp limestone, which everywhere seemed solid. He slowly returned to the table, to stand under the lamp. His skin crawled as he considered the bleak shape of his future. The repurification rite might well be more rigorous than the original rite . . . The open door held a horrible fascination. It indicated the way to the outdoors, where Mur dearly longed to be; on the other hand it threatened a terrible penalty.

Time passed: an hour. Mur studied the Doctrine, committing whole paragraphs to memory, working till his head swam and his eyes smarted. On the fourth page, mold obscured the characters, across fully half a page; the fifth and sixth pages were likewise blotched. Mur peered at the pages in dismay. How could he learn the Elucidations when they were illegible? Osso would never accept any such glib excuse. "Why were you not prepared with your own copy of Hakcil? When I was a Pure Boy, it was my constant companion!" Or, "These pages are elementary: you should have known them long ago." On the other hand, reflected Mur, the marred volume offered a valid pretext for him to try the corridor. If someone were on guard, he could display the illegible pages and ask for an Elucidations in better condition . . . Mur half rose to his feet. The corridor showed as a sinister dark rectangle.

Mur sat down once more. The time must be well into the night; no Chilite would be standing on guard, certainly! Nor any Pure Boy. Might there be an alarm of some sort? Mur thought the prospect unlikely. The Chilites would not care to be disturbed at their spasms.

The outer door had not been locked; perhaps the corridor was open! Mur licked his lips. Slowly he rose to his feet and crossed the room, one furtive step at a time. He looked down the passage as far

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as the overhead bulb cast a glimmer—ten or fifteen feet. He looked back up at the bulb; it hung ten feet over his head. He stood the bench on the table and climbed up; the bulb still hung three feet out of reach. Mur descended to the floor, awkward and lumpish as an old man; once more he went to look into the dark passage. Beyone all reasonable doubt it was locked off—or it held a trap . . . Mur tried to remember the way of the passage. As the monstrator walked ahead, he had held his light-bulb high, revealing a vaulted ceiling of dank stone. Mur had seen neither cages nor dangling nets, though these might easily have been arranged after his passage. The trip in such a case must be a thread across the corridor, or perhaps an electrical contact, though the Chilites had small electrical expertise and in fact distrusted both electricity and biomechanisms. The trap, if it existed, would be simple and more than likely activated by a trip close to the floor.

Mur's heart rose up in his mouth as he contemplated the dark tunnel. It was the most important moment of his life. As Faman Bougozonie he could remain at the table to study the catechism and the incomplete Elucidations; as Gastel Etzwane he could grope along the passageway and hope to reach the open night.

Mur gave a thin whimper; dropping to his hands and knees, he crept into the dark. The light went dim behind him. Mur began a careful investigation of the darkness, feeling out with great delicacy and caution, for thread, string, rod or trip-board. The passage, so he recalled, would turn first left, then right; he kept close to the left wall.

Darkness was complete. Mur tested the air, as if searching for cobwebs. When nothing perceptible was evident, he felt the floor with equal care, probing every inch before he pulled himself forward.

Foot by painful foot he advanced, darkness pressing upon him like a palpable substance. He was too tense to feel fear; past and future were out of mind; there was only Now, with grinding danger close at hand. With fingers like moth antennae he searched the darkness: on these fingers his life depended. To his left he lost contact with the wall; the first turn. He stopped short, feeling the walls on both sides, testing the joints of the stone blocks. He turned the corner, anxious to advance, but reluctant to leave safe, tested territory. He could still return to the study chamber . . . Ahead lay the area where danger most likely might be expected. With the most exquisite care he searched the darkness, feeling the air, the walls, the floor. Inch by inch, foot by foot he moved for-

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ward . . . His fingers felt a strange texture along the floor: a rasp, a grain, not so cold as stone. Wood. Wood on the floor. Mur felt for the joint between stone and wood. It ran across the passage, at right angles to the walls. With his knees on the stone Mur reached ahead, feeling first for thread, then testing the floor, now wood. He discovered no thread; the wood seemed sound. He discovered no brinks, no lack of solidity. Lying flat on his face, Mur reached forward as far as his arms could stretch. He felt only wood. He wriggled ahead a few inches and felt again. Wood. He pounded down with his fist, and thought to hear a hollow boom rather than the dullness of a plank on soil or mortar. Danger, danger. He inched forward. The floor began to tilt, elevating his feet. Hastily he retreated. The floor dropped back into place. The wooden section was pivoted near the center. Had he been walking, groping along the walls, he could not have recovered. Once past the balance point, with the back half of the trap rising into the air, he would have been gone, to fall toppling and sprawling through the darkness, to whatever lay below. Mur lay quiet, with lips drawn back in a wolfish grin. He measured from stone to pivot-place: the length of his body, five feet. Ahead, after the pivot, was presumably another five feet of unsupported surface. Had he carried a light, he might have risked a running leap. But not in the dark. Suppose he miscalculated and jumped short . . . Mur's grin became so tight the muscles of his cheeks ached. He needed a plank, a ladder, something of the sort . . . He thought of the bench, back in the study chamber, which was six feet long. Rising to his feet, feeling along the wall, he returned much faster than he had come. The chamber was quiet, almost somnolent. Mur took up the bench and carried it back into the dark passage, which now he knew so well. He reached the turn, and once again cautious, dropped to his hands and knees and dragged the bench beside him, upside down. He came to the wood section. Bringing the bench past him, he thrust it ahead until he estimated that the near end rested over the pivot and the far end, hopefully, on solid stone. With the utmost care and precision he rested his weight on the bench, ready to scramble back at a quiver.

The bench held steady. Mur crossed, and at the far end felt stone under his fingers. He grinned, this time in relief and pleasure.

He was not yet free of the passage. He proceeded as cautiously as before and presently came to the second turn. A few yards ahead glimmered a wan bulb. It shone on a door: the old timber door giving upon the unused un-

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der-room. Heart in throat once more, Mur stepped forward. The door was locked, not so much to keep him in, he suspected, but to prevent some unwary Chilite or Pure Boy from blundering upon the trap.

Mur made a sad sound and went to look at the door. It was built of solid planks, doweled and glued, with hinges of sintered ironweb. The frame was wood, somewhat soft and rotten, thought Mur. He pushed against the door, bracing himself and thrusting with the trifling weight of his immature body. The door stood firm. Mur hurled himself at the door. He thought the latch creaked slightly. He battered himself again and again at the door, but other than causing a creaking of old wood, he achieved nothing. Mur's body became bruised and sore, though the pain meant nothing to him. He stood back panting. He remembered the bench and ran back down the passage, around the turn and slowly forward until he felt the end of the bench. He dragged it across the trap-section and carried it back to the door. Aiming it, he ran forward to thrust the end against the latch. The frame splintered, the door burst back, and Mur was out into the under-room, echoing and empty.

He placed the bench along one of the walls, where it would never be noticed. Closing the door, he pressed the splintered wood into place. It might well escape notice, and the Chilites would have cause for perplexity!

A moment later he stepped out into the night and looked up at the blazing stars. "I am Gastel Etzwane," he muttered in exultation. "As Gastel Etzwane I escaped the Chilites; as Gastel Etzwane I have much to do."

He was not yet free and away. His escape would be discovered in due course, perhaps in the morning, at the latest within two or three days. Osso could not call upon the Faceless Man, but he might well send up into the wildlands for ahulph trackers. No trail was too old or too faint for the ahulphs; they would follow until their quarry mounted a wheeled vehicle, a boat or a balloon. Gastel Etzwane must once again use his ingenuity. Osso would expect him to flee, to put all possible distance between himself and Bashon. Hence, if he remained close for a day, until the ahulphs had cast about fruitlessly and had been sent with a curse back to their master, he might be able to go his way unhindered—wherever the way might lie.

A hundred yards below and around the hill lay the tannery, its sheds and outbuildings, with dozens of secure nooks and crannies. Gastel Etzwane stood to the side of the portal, hidden in the shadow, listening to the night

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sounds. He felt as strange and subtle as a ghost. Above in the temple, the Chilites lay in the galga smoke, worshiping Galexis; their gasps of adoration were stifled in the heavy darkness.

Gastel Etzwane stood several moments in the shadows. He felt no urgency, no need for haste. His first concern was the ahulphs, which almost certainly would be called on to track him, by signs invisible to human senses. He slipped back into the temple and presently found an old cloak, cast aside in a corner. Taking it to the portal, he tore it in half. Throwing down first one half on the stony ground, then the other, and jumping forward, he made his way away from the temple and down the slope, leaving neither track nor scent for the ahulphs. Gastel Etzwane laughed in quiet exultation, as he reached the first of the tannery outbuildings.

He took refuge under one of these sheds. Pillowing his head on the torn cloak, he fell asleep.

Sasetta, Ezeletta and Zael came dancing up over the horizon, to shoot shifting beams of colored light from the east. From the temple sounded a throbbing chime, summoning the Pure Boys to the temple kitchens where they must boil up gruel for the Chilite's breakfast. Into the eastern courtyard came the Chilites themselves, haggard and red-eyed, their beards stinking of galga smoke. They staggered to benches and sat looking drearily off into the wan sunlight, still somewhat bemused. The tannery women already had taken bread and tea; they trudged forth to work, some surly, others voluble. Eathre had been assigned to the cleaning tables; she worked only a hundred feet from where Mur lay hidden.

From the direction of the temple came a small commotion. Pure Boys ran out in excitement to peer across the valley; Chilites appeared on the upper terrace, talking in some agitation, pointing here and there. Etzwane guessed that his absence had been discovered, somewhat earlier than he had expected. He watched in a discordant blend of dread and glee. Amusing to see the Chilites in such perturbation, horrifying as well! If he were tracked down and captured . . . His flesh crawled at the thought.

Shortly before noon the ahulphs arrived: two bucks with red adept ribbons tied up and down the coarse black fur of their crooked legs. Great Male Osso, standing austerely on a pedestal, explained his needs in dadu.* The ahulphs listened, laughing like foxes. Osso dropped a shirt which Etzwane presumed to be one of his own. The ahulphs seized the shirt in their manlike hands,

Dadu: a language of finger signs and the syllables da, de, di, do, du.

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pressed it to the odor detectors in their feet, tossed it into the air in a display of the raffish heedlessness which the Chilites found completely detestable. They went to Osso and gave him vehement waggish reassurance. Osso at last made an impatient gesture. The ahulphs, after looking this way and that for something worth stealing, went to the Pure Boys' under-room. Here, detecting Etzwane's scent, they leapt into the air and called back to Osso in vast enthusism.

The Pure Boys watched in horrified excitement, as did Etzwane himself, for fear that some trace of his odor might waft itself to the ahulphs.

The two cast about the temple, and Etzwane was relieved when they crossed his trail and discovered nothing. Somewhat dampened, with earflaps hanging dolefully low, they traced around Eathre's old cottage, again without success. Raging at each other in ahulph fashion, snapping, kicking out with the white talons concealed in their soft black feet, swirling their fur in spiral bristles, they returned to where Osso stood waiting and explained in dadu that the quarry had gone off upon wheels. Osso turned on his heel and stalked into the temple. The ahulphs ran south, back up Mirk Valley into the Hwan Wildlands.

Peering through his cranny, Etzwane watched the community resume its normal routine. The Pure Boys, disappointed at being deprived of a terrifying spectacle, resumed their duties. The tannery women worked stolidly at the vats, tubs, and tables. Chilites sat like thin white birds on benches along the upper terrace of the temple. Sunlight, tinted noontime lavender, struck down at white dust and parched soil.

The tannery workers went to the refectory. Etzwane directed urgencies toward his mother: *Come this way, come closer!* But Eathre moved off without turning her head. An hour later she returned to her table. Etzwane crawled back under the floor and worked up into the shed itself: a storage place for kegs of chemicals, tools and the like.

Etzwane found a lump of sal soda and cautiously approaching the doorway tossed the lump toward his mother. It dropped almost at her feet. She seemed not to notice. Then, as if suddenly interrupted from her thoughts, she glanced at the ground.

Etzwane tossed another lump. Eathre raised her head, looked blankly around the landscape, finally toward the shed. From the shadow Etzwane made a signal. Eathre frowned, and looked away. Etzwane stared in puzzlement. Had she seen him? Why had she frowned?

Past the shed and into Etz-

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wane's range of vision stalked Great Male Osso. He halted halfway between the shed and the table where Eathre worked. She seemed lost in another dimension of consciousness.

Osso signaled the task-mistress and muttered a few words. The woman went to Eathre, who without comment or surprise left her work and walked toward Osso. He made a peremptory signal to halt her while she was still fifteen feet distant, and spoke in a low burning tone. Etzwane could not distinguish his words, nor Eathre's calm responses. Osso jerked back and turned on his heel. He stalked back past the shed, so close that had Etzwane reached forth, he might have touched the cold face.

Eathre did not instantly return to her work. As if pondering Osso's words, she wandered over to the shed and stood by the door.

"Mur, are you there?"

"Yes, mother. I am here."

"You must leave Bashon. Go tonight, as soon as the sun sets."

"Can you come with me? Mother, please come."

"No. Osso holds my indenture. The Faceless Man would take my head."

"I will find the Faceless Man," declared Etzwane fervently. "I will tell him of the bad things here. He will take Osso's head."

Eathre smiled. "Don't be too sure. Osso obeys canton law—only too well."

"If I go, Osso will abuse you! He'll make you work at all the hardest jobs."

"It is all the same. The days come and go. I am glad you are leaving; it is what I wanted for you. After dark go forth. Since you wear no torc, be careful of the work-jobbers, especially in Durrume and Cansume and in Seamus as well, where they will put you into a balloon-gang. When you become of age, get a musician's torc, then you may travel without hindrance. Do not go to the old house, nor to Delamber's. Do not go for the khitan. I have a few coins put aside but I can't get them for you now. I will not see you again."

"Yes, you will, you will!" cried Etzwane. "I'll petition the Faceless Man, and he'll let you go with me."

Eathre smiled wistfully. "Not while Osso holds my indenture. Good-bye, Mur." She went back to the worktable. Etzwane retreated into the shed. He did not watch his mother.

The day waned; the women trooped off to their dormitories. When darkness came Etzwane emerged from the shed and stole off downhill.

Despite Eathre's warning, he went down to the old cottage on Rhododendron Way, already occupied by another woman. He slipped into the rear, found the khitan, and went off through the

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shadows, down the road. He traveled west, toward Garwiy, where the Faceless Man lived—or so went the rumor.

Shant, an irregular oblong thirteen hundred miles long and six hundred miles wide, was separated from the dark bulk of Caraz by a hundred miles of water, the Straits of Pagane, flowing between the Green Ocean and the Purple Ocean. South across the Great Salt Bog, Palasedra hung down between the Purple Ocean and the Blue Ocean like a three-fingered hand, or an udder with three teats.

A thousand miles east of Shant appeared the first islands of the Beljamar, a vast archipelago, dividing the Green Ocean from the Blue Ocean. The population of Caraz was unknown; there were relatively few Palasedrans; the Beljamar supported a few oceanic nomads; most of Durdane's population inhabited the sixty-two cantons of Shant, in a loose confederation under the rule of the Faceless Man.

The cantons of Shant were alike only in their mutual distrust. Each regarded as Universal Principle its own custom, costumes, jargon, and mannerisms, and considered all else eccentricity.

The impersonal, unqualified rule of the Anome—in popular usage, the Faceless Man—exactly suited the xenophobic folk of the cantons. Governmental apparatus was simple; the Anome made few financial demands; the laws enforced, for the most part, were those formulated by the cantons themselves. The Anome's justice might be merciless and abrupt, but it was even-handed and adhered to a simple principle, clear to all: *He who breaks the law, dies.* The Faceless Man's authority derived from the torc, a band of flexite, coded in various shades of purple, dark scarlet or maroon, blue, green, gray, and rarely, brown.

The torc contained a strand of explosive: dexax, which the Faceless Man, if necessary, could detonate by means of a coded radiation. An attempt to remove the torc worked to the same effect. Usually, when a person lost his head, the cause was well-known: he had broken the laws of his canton. On rare occasions, detonation might take a person's head for reasons mysterious and inscrutable; whereupon folk would move with great care and diffidence, lest they too excite the unpredictable wrath of the Faceless Man.

No area of Shant was too remote; from Ilwiy to the Straits of Pagane detonations occurred and felons lost their heads. It was known that the Anome employed deputies, somewhat tartly known as Benevolences, who subserved the Anome's will.

Garwiy, where the Faceless Man made his headquarters, was

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the largest city of Shant, the industrial node of all Durdane. Along the Jardeen River and in the district known as Shranke on the Jardeen Estuary were a hundred glassworks, foundries and machine shops, biomechanical fabricating plants, bioelectric works where the organic monomolecules of Canton Fenesq were stranded into null-ohm conductors, bonded to semiliving filters, valves and switches, to produce fragile, temperamental and highly expensive electronic gear. Bioengineers commanded high prestige; at the opposite end of the social scale were the musicians, who nevertheless excited pangs of romantic envy in the settled folk of Shant. Music, like language and color symbology, transcended the canton boundaries, affecting the entire population.

In Canton Amaze a thousand, two thousand musicians took part in the annual seiach: a vast wash of sound swelling and subsiding like wind, or surf, with occasional tides, vague and indistinct, of clear little waif-bells. More general was the music played by wandering troupes: jigs and wind-ups; set-pieces and sonatas, shararas, sarabands, ballads, caprices, quick-steps. A druithine might accompany such a troupe; more often he wandered alone, playing as he fancied. Lesser folk might sing words or chant poetry; the druithine played only music, to express his total experience, all his joy and grief. Such a person had been Etzwane's blood-father, the great Dystar.

In his childhood daydreams Etzwane had seen himself wandering the roads of Shant, taking his khitan to fests and gatherings, until at last the two met; from here the daydream went various directions. Sometimes Dystar wept to hear music so lovely; when Etzwane identified himself, Dystar's wonder exceeded all bounds. Sometimes Dystar and the indomitable youth found themselves opposed in a battle of music; in his mind Etzwane heard the glorious tunes, the rhythms and counter-rhythms, the clink of the jingle-bar, the gratifying rasp of the scratch-box.

The daydreams at last had taken on a ghost of substance. Khitan slung over his narrow back, Etzwane trudged the roads of Shant, and all his future lay before him.

An hour before dawn he passed a village, a dozen cottages around a small, neat square paved with slabs of slate. To the rear stood silos, a warehouse, and the bulbous tanks of a brewery. A three-story building beside the road was evidently an inn. Folk were already astir in the cookshed to the rear. Etzwane saw the blink of a fire. Beside the inn waited three large vans, loaded with fresh

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white butts and tubs of Shimrod Forest larch, destined for one or another of the distilleries. From the stable behind the inn a groom was bringing draft animals: bullocks derived from terrestrial beef stock, placid and dependable but slow. Etzwane dodged past, hoping not to be seen in the predawn murk.

The road ahead crossed a flat waste strewn with rocks. No shelter was visible, nor any plantation from which he might have gleaned a bite or two of nourishment. His spirits dropped to their lowest ebb; he felt as if he could walk no more; his throat was parched and his stomach ached with hunger. Only fear of the ahulph restrained him from seeking a hidden spot among the rocks in which to make himself a bed of dry leaves. Finally fatigue overcame the fear. He could walk no longer. He stumbled to a spot behind a ledge of rotten shale and wrapping himself in his robe lay down to rest. He lapsed into a numb daze, something other than sleep. A grating, grumbling sound aroused him: the passage of the vans. The suns were an hour into the sky; though he had not slept, or thought he had not slept, daylight had come without his notice.

The vans passed by and rumbled away into the west. Etzwane jumped up to look after them, thinking that here was opportunity to confuse the ahulphs. The teamsters rode on the forward benches and could not see to the rear. Etzwane ran to catch up. He swung himself aboard the last van and sat with his feet hanging over the bed. After a few moments he drew himself further back, into a convenient crevice. He intended to ride only a mile or two, then jump down, but so convenient and comfortable was his seat, so restful and secure seemed the dark nook, that he became drowsy and fell asleep.

Etzwane awoke, to blink out from his cranny at a pair of unrecognizable rectangles, one impinged on the other. The first blazed lavender-white; the second was a panel of striated dark green. Etzwane's mind moved sluggishly. What was this odd scene? He crawled slowly to the back of the van, mind still fuzzy. The white was the wall of a white-washed building in the full glare of noon sunlight. The dark-green panel was the side of a van thrust across his field of vision. Etzwane remembered where he was. He had been asleep; the cessation of motion had wakened him. How far had he come? Probably to Carbade, in Seamus. Not the best place to be, if the oddments of information he had picked up along Rhododendron Way were to be believed. The folk of Seamus reputedly gave nothing and took whatever might be had. Etzwane

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climbed stiffly from the van. Best to be on his way, before he was discovered. No more fear of the ahulphs, at any rate . . .

From not too far away came the sound of voices. Etzwane slipped around the van, to confront a black-bearded man with hollow white cheeks and round blue eyes. He wore a teamster's black canvas trousers, a dirty white vest with wooden buttons; he stood with legs apart, hands held up in surprise. He seemed pleased, rather than angry . . . . "And what have we here, in this young bandit? So this is how they train them, to raid the cargo hardly before the wheels come to a stop. And not even a torc around his neck."

Etzwane spoke in a tremulous voice which he tried to hold grave and earnest. "I stole nothing, sir; I rode only a short way in the van."

"That's theft of transportation," declared the teamster. "You admit the fact yourself. Well, then, come along."

Etzwane shrank back. "Come along where?"

"Where you'll learn a useful trade. I'm doing you a favor."

"I have a trade!" cried Etzwane. "I'm a musician! See! Here is my khitan!"

"You're nothing without your torc. Come along."

Etzwane tried to dodge away; the teamster caught him by the gown. Etzwane kicked and struggled; the teamster cuffed him, then held him off. "Do you want worse? Mind your manners!" He pulled at the khitan; the instrument fell to the ground, the neck snapped away from the box.

Etzwane gave a stifled cry and stared down at the tangle of wood and string. The teamster seized his arm and marched him into the depot to a table where four men sat at a gaming board. Three were teamsters; the fourth was a Seam, the conical straw hat pushed up from his round red face.

"A vagabond in my van," said Etzwane's captor. "Looks to be bright and lively; no torc, notice. What should I do to help him?"

The four gave Etzwane a silent inspection.

One of the teamsters grunted and turned back to the dice. "Let the lad go his way. He doesn't want your help."

"Ah, but you're wrong! Every citizen of the realm must toil; ask the job-broker here. What do you say, job-broker?"

The Seam leaned back in his chair, pushed his hat back at a precarious angle. "He's undersized; he looks unruly. Still, I suppose I can get him a post, perhaps up at Angwin. Twenty florins?"

"For the sake of quick business—done."

The Seam rose ponderously to his feet. He signaled to Etzwane. "Come along."

Etzwane was confined in a

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closet for the better part of a day, then marched to a wagon and conveyed a mile south of Carbade, to the balloon-way depot. Half an hour later the southbound balloon *Misran* appeared, wind on a broad reach, the dolly singing up the slot. Observing the semaphore, the wind-tender eased his forward cables, allowing the *Misran* to fall broadside to the wind and lose way. A quarter mile down the slot from the depot the tackle-man brought it to a halt, pinned the after trucks with an anchor-bolt. The spreader-bar was detached; the balloon-guys were slipped into snatch-blocks on the front trucks; now the Judas-dolly was hauled south along the slot, pulling the balloon to the ground.

Etzwane was taken to the gondola and put into the charge of the wind-tender. The Judas-dolly was rolled back along the track and engaged with the spreader-bar, the balloon rising once more to its running altitude. The anchor-pin was removed from the after trucks. Front trucks, thirty-foot spreader-bar, after trucks constituted the working-dolly; the *Misran* once more rode free. The wind-tender winched in the forward guys, warping the balloon across the wind; off and away up the slot sang the dolly, gathering speed, and Carbade was left behind.*

During the middle afternoon the wind shifted forward. The wind-tender winched in his forward guy to close-haul the balloon. Driven closer to the ground, he canted the bridles to provide lift, to raise the *Misran* into a clear stream of air.

The rolling barley fields gave way to rocky hills splotched with thickets of blue and dark-orange fester-shrub, from which the ancient ahulphs had cut their weap-

**The typical balloon, carrying four to eight passengers and a wind-tender, was a semiflexible slab one unit of dimension wide, eight units long, four units high. The skeleton might be bamboo, tempered glass tubing, or rods of cemented glass fiber. The membrane was the dorsal skin of a gigantic coelenterate, nurtured and forced until it completely filled a large shallow tank, whereupon the skin was lifted and cured. Hydrogen provided buoyancy.*

The slots in which the dollies ran were precast members of concrete reinforced with glass fiber, attached to foundation-sleepers. The usual dolly consisted of two sets of trucks, separated by a truss thirty feet long, at the ends of which the guys were attached. The wind-tender used trimming winches to shorten or lengthen bow and stern lines, thus controlling wind-aspect, and the canting winch, to alter the shape of the bridles at bow and stern and thus control the angle of heel.

Under optimum circumstances, velocity reached sixty or seventy miles an hour. The routes made purposeful use of prevailing winds. Where the route consistently encountered adverse winds or calm, motive power was applied to the dollies at ground level, by an endless cable driven by water wheels, or a workgang at a windlass or by a gravity-cart loaded with stone. Balloons passed each other at sidings, or traded dollies.

Where the route crossed gorges, as at Angwin Junction, or met otherwise unfavorable terrain, a cable of ironweb strands formed a link in the slot.

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ons. To the south rose the Hwan, the great central spine of Shant, across which ran the Great Transverse Route. Late in the afternoon the *Misran* rushed up the last steep ten miles of slot and reached Angwin North Station, where a work-gang shifted the guys to a shackle on a mile-long endless cable suspended across a gorge. The work-gang turned a windlass; the *Misran* was guided sedately up to Angwin Junction, where the North Spur joined the Great Transverse Route. The guys were shifted to another endless loop, reaching across an even more stupendous gorge to Angwin proper, and here the *Misran* descended. The wind-tender took Etzwane to the Angwin superintendent, who at first grumbled. "What kind of whiffets and sad bantlings are they sending me now? Where can I use him? He lacks weight to push a windlass; also I don't like the look in his eye."

The wind-tender shrugged and glanced down at Etzwane. "He's a bit under the usual standard, but that's no business of mine. If you don't want him, I'll take him back down to Pertzel."

"Hmmf. Not so fast. What's his price?"

"Pertzel wants two hundred."

"For a creature like that? I'll give a hundred."

"That's not my instructions."

"Instructions be damned. Pertzel's using us both for fools. Leave the creature here. If Pertzel won't take a hundred, pick him up on your next trip. Meanwhile I'll hold off his torc."

"A hundred is cheap. He'll grow; he's nimble; he can switch as many shackles as can a man."

"This I realize. He'll go across to Junction, and I'll bring the topman over here for the windlass."

The wind-tender laughed. "So you're getting a windlass-man for the price of a hundred-florin boy?"

The superintendent grinned. "Don't tell Pertzel that."

"Not I. It's between the two of you."

"Good. Ride him back to Junction; I'll flash over a message." He frowned down at Etzwane. "What's expected of you, boy, is brisk, accurate work. Do your stint and the balloon-way is not so bad. If you shirk or don't perform, you'll find me harsh as hacklebush . . ."

Etzwane rode back across the gorge to Angwin Junction. The *Misran* was hauled down by a hand-winch, a blond, stocky youth not much older than Etzwane turning the crank.

Etzwane was put down; the *Misran* rose once more into the gathering dusk and was hauled down over the gorge to North Station, on the North Spur.

The blond youth took Etzwane into a low stone shed, where two young men sat at a table eating a supper of broad-beans and tea.

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The blond youth announced: "Here's the new hand. What's your name, lad?"

"I am Gastel Etzwane."

"Gastel Etzwane it is. I am Finnerack; yonder is Ishiel the Mountain Poet, and he with the long face is Dickon. Will you eat? Our fare is not the best: beans and bread and tea, but it's better than going hungry."

Etzwane took a plate of beans, which were barely warm. Finnerack jerked his thumb to the east. "Old Dagbolt rations our fuel, not to mention our water, provisions and everything else worth using."

Dickon spoke in a surly voice: "Now I'll have to go grind windlass under Dagbolt's very nose. No talk, no chaffer, quiet orderly work, that's Dagbolt for you. Here at least a man can spit in any direction he chooses."

"It's the same for all of us," said Ishiel. "In a year or two they'll bring me across, then it will be Finnerack's turn. And in the course of five or six years Gastel Etzwane will make the change and we'll be reunited."

"Not if I can avoid it," said Dickon. "I'll put in for slot-cleaning duty and at least be on the move. If Dagbolt turns me down, I'll become the premier gambler of the Junction. Never fear, lads, I'll be out of my indenture before ten years have passed."

"My good wishes," remarked Finnerack. "You've won all my money; I hope you get the service of it."

In the morning Finnerack instructed Etzwane in his duties. He would stand shifts in turn with Finnerack and Ishiel. When a balloon passed along the Transverse Route, he must ease the clamp and shackle around the idler-sheave. When a balloon came up the North Spur, or returned, the man on duty, using a claw-lever chained to the floor, hooked into the guys and switched the balloon from one cable to the other. As the youngest member of the crew, Etzwane was also required to oil the sheaves, keep the hut swept out, and boil the morning gruel. The work was neither arduous nor complicated; the crew had ample leisure, which they spent crocheting fancy vests for sale in the town, and gambling with the proceeds, to earn enough to pay off their indentures. Finnerack told Etzwane: "Over at Angwin, Dagbolt forbids gambling. He says he wants to stop the fights. Bah! From time to time some lucky chap wins enough to buy himself free, and that's the last thing Dagbolt wants."

Etzwane looked around the station. They stood on a bleak windswept ledge fifty yards across, directly below the stupendous mass of Mount Mish and between two gorges. Etzwane asked, "How long have you been here?"

"Two years," said Finnerack.

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Etzwane studied Mount Mish and was daunted: impossible to scale the crags which beetled over the station. The precipices which descended into the gorges were no less baleful. Finnerack gave a sad, knowing laugh. "You'd like to find a way down?"

"Yes, I would."

Finnerack showed neither surprise nor disapproval. "Now's the time, before they clamp on your torc. Don't think I haven't considered it, torc and all."

At the edge of the precipice they looked down and off across a gulf of air. "I've stood here by the hours," said Finnerack wistfully, "tracing how I'd climb down to the valley. From here down to that nose of red granite a person would need a length of rope, or he might scramble down that fissure, had he the nerve. Then he'd have to work himself across the face of that scarp—it looks worse than it is, I dare say. From there to that tumble of scree should not be impossible, and only hard work thereafter down to the valley floor. But then what? It's a hundred miles to a village, with no food nor water. And do you know what you'd find along the way?"

"Wild ahulphs."

"I wasn't thinking of ahulphs, but you'd find them too, the wicked Phag brood." Finnerack searched the valley floor. "I saw one just the other day . . ." He pointed. "Look! By that needle of black rock. I think there's a cave or a shelter there. It's where I saw the other."

Etzwane looked and thought he saw a stir of movement. "What is it?"

"A Roguskhoi . . . Do you know what that is?"

"It's a kind of mountain savage, that can't be controlled except by its yearning for strong drink."

"Great womanizers, as well. I've never seen one close at hand, and I hope I never do. What if they took it into their heads to climb up here? They'd chop us to bits!"

"Much to Dagbolt's horror," suggested Etzwane.

"Too right! He'd have to buy in three new indentures. He'd rather we'd die of overwork, or old age."

Etzwane looked wistfully down the valley. "I had planned to be a musician . . . Does anyone ever earn enough to buy off their indentures?"

"Dagbolt does his best to prevent it," said Finnerack. "He operates a commissary where he sells Seam beer, fruit, sweetmeats, and the like. When the men gamble, it always seems to be one of the career ratings who wins the money, and no one knows how they achieve such luck . . . One way or another, it's not all so bad. Perhaps I'll make a career myself. There are always jobs opening up below—on the windlass, as a slot-cleaner or motive-man. If you

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learn electrics, you might get into communications. As for me, I'd like to be a wind-tender. Think of it!" Finnerack flung back his head, looked around the sky. "Up in the balloon, running the winches, with the dolly skirring along the slot below. There's sheer fun! And one day it's Pagane and Amaze, the next Garwiy, then off over the Great Transverse Route to Pelmonte and Whearn and the Blue Ocean."

"I suppose it's not a bad life," said Etzwane dubiously. "Still—" he could not bring himself to finish.

Finnerack shrugged. "Until they torc you, you're free to run off. Be sure I won't stop you, or Ishiel. In fact we'll lower you down the cliff. But it's terrible country and you'd be going to your death. Still—were I you, without my torc, perhaps I'd try." He raised his head as a horn sounded. "Come along, a balloon is crossing over from Angwin."

They returned to the station. The shift was technically Etzwane's; Finnerack was standing by to break him in. The approaching balloon hung aslant the sky, lurching and bobbing as the cable drew it against the wind. The guys, fore and aft, were shackled to an iron ring, which in turn was chained to a grip on the drive-line. The ring bore a black marker, indicating that it must be switched down the North Spur. The grip entered the sheave, and passed halfway around the circumference. Finnerack pushed an electric signal to the windlass-chief at Angwin and threw a brake which halted the drive-line. He hooked the claw-lever into the ring, worked the arm to pull down the ring and loosen the grip. Etzwane transferred the grip to the North Spur line; Finnerack disengaged the lever-jack. The balloon now hung on the North Spur drive-line. Finnerack pushed the electric signal to the windlass at North Station; the drive-line tautened; the balloon drifted away on the south wind.

Half an hour later another balloon arrived from the east, lurching and straining to the breeze blowing down from Mount Mish. The grip passed across the idler sheave without attention from Finnerack or Etzwane; the balloon continued across the gorge to Angwin, thence on toward Garwiy.

Not long afterward, another balloon came in from the west, destined as before to the North Spur. Etzwane said to Finnerack, "This time let me do the whole transfer. You stand to the side and watch that I do everything correctly."

"Just as you like," said Finnerack. "I must say you're very keen."

"Yes," said Etzwane. "I'm very keen indeed. I plan to take your advice."

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"Indeed? And make a balloonway career?"

"I plan to give the matter thought," said Etzwane. "As you have remarked, I am not yet clamped and not yet committed."

"Tell that to Dagbolt," said Finnerack. "Here comes the grip; be handy with the signal and the brake."

The grip entered the sheave; as it reached the circumference, Etzwane pressed the signal and braked the wheel.

"Quite right," said Finnerack.

Etzwane brought up the clawjack, hooked it into the ring, drew down slack, and detached the grip.

"Exactly right," said Finnerack, "You've learned the knack, no question of it."

Etzwane caught the grip on the edge of the sheave, released the lever-jack, shook away the hook. He stepped up into the ring and kicked free the grip. Finnerack stared in bewilderment. "What are you doing?" he gasped. "You've set free the balloon!"

"Exactly," called Etzwane. "Give my regards to Dagbolt . . . Good-bye, Finnerack."

The balloon swept him away on the wind from Mount Mish, while Finnerack watched open-mouthed from below. Etzwane perched with one foot in the ring and, clutching the guy-lines, waved his hand. Finnerack, standing foreshortened with head turned back, raised his arm in dubious farewell.

In the balloon the wind-tender realized that something had gone amiss but knew no remedy for the situation. "Attention all," he cried out to the passengers. "The guys have slipped; we are floating free, in a northwest direction, which will take us safely across the Wildlands. There is no danger! Everyone please remain calm. When we approach a settled community, I will valve gas and lower us to the ground. For the unavoidable change of schedule, I extend the official apologies of the balloonway."

5

The balloon floated down from the Hwan in the halcyon quiet of the upper air. Etzwane rode surrounded by lavender-white radiance; so unreal and peaceful were the circumstances, he felt no fear. Underneath passed the great forests of Canton Trestevan: parasol darabas, dark maroon and purple, soft-seeming as feather dusters, returning ripples of wincing greenish bronze to the touch of the wind.

The forests persisted into Canton Sable, then gave way to a region of small farms and a thousand small ponds. The villages were tiny toys, exuding minuscule wisps of smoke. Along the roads moved infinitesimal wagons and

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traps, drawn by insect-size bullocks and pacers. Etzwane would have enjoyed the landscape had he been more comfortable.

The wind had died to a murmur; the balloon drifted with great deliberation into Canton Frill, a green, dark-blue, brown, white and purple checkerboard of fields and orchards. A meandering river, the Lurne, was a casual insult of nature to the human geometry of hedges and roads. Ten miles to the west the river passed through a market town, built in the typical Frillish style: tobacco-brown panels of pressed gum-leaves, between posts of polished iban, rising two or even three stories.

The wind-tender had hoped to drift on into Canton Cathriy where the trade winds blowing in from Shellflower Bay would take him southwest to meet the Great Transverse Route, somewhere in Canton Maiy, but he had to reckon with his passengers. They had divided into two factions. The first had become impatient, hanging motionless in the still air, and demanded that the balloon be put down. The second, to the contrary, feared that the wind would rise and sweep them out over the Green Ocean; they insisted even more emphatically that the balloon be lowered.

The wind-tender at last threw up his arms and valved out a quantity of gas, until his altimeter indicated gradual descent. He opened his floor panel to inspect the terrain below and for the first time noticed Etzwane. He peered down in shock and suspicion, but he could be sure of nothing. In any event he was powerless to act, unless he chose to slide down one of the guy-lines to confront the unauthorized passenger, which he did not care to do.

The guys sank into the thick blue grass of a meadow. Etzwane jumped gratefully out of the ring; the balloon, relieved of his weight, swung back aloft. Etzwane ran like a wild creature for the hedge. Heedless of cuts and scratches, he burst through the brambles and into a lane, where he ran pell-mell until he came to a copse of yapnut trees. He plunged into the shadows and stood till he caught his breath.

He could see nothing but foliage. Selecting the tallest tree in sight, he climbed until he could see over the hedge and across the meadow.

The balloon was down, anchored to a stump. The passengers had alighted and stood arguing with the wind-tender, demanding immediate fare rebates and expense money. This the wind-tender refused to pay over, in the certain knowledge that the main office clerks would not casually refund these sums unless he were able to produce detailed vouchers, invoices and receipts.

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The passengers began to grow ugly; the wind-tender at last resolved the matter by breaking loose the anchor and scrambling into the gondola. Relieved of the passengers, the balloon rose swiftly and drifted away, leaving the passengers in a disconsolate cluster.

For three weeks Etzwane roamed the countryside, a gaunt, harsh-featured lad in the rags of his Pure Boy gown. In the heart of the yapnut grove he built a little den of twigs and leaves, in which he maintained a tiny fire, blown up from a coal stolen at a farmhouse hearth. He stole other articles: an old jacket of green homespun, a lump of black sausage, a roll of coarse cord, and a bundle of hay, with which he planned to make himself a bed. The hay was insufficient; he returned for a second bundle and stole an old earthenware bowl as well, with which the farmer fed his fowl. On this latter occasion, as he jumped from the back window of the barn, he was sighted by the boys of the farm, who gave chase, and harried him through the woods, until at last he went to cover in a dense thicket. He heard them destroying his den and exclaiming in anger at the stolen goods, and as they blundered past: "—Yodel's ahulphs will winkle him out. They can take him back upland for their pains." Cold chills coursed down Etzwane's back. When the boys left the wood, he climbed the tall tree and watched them return to their farm. "They won't bring in ahulphs," he told himself in a hollow voice. "They'll forget all about me tomorrow. After all, it was just a bit of hay . . . And old coat . . ."

On the following day Etzwane kept an anxious watch on the farmhouse. When he saw the folk going about their normal duties, he became somewhat less fearful.

The next morning when he climbed the tree, to his horror he saw three ahulphs beside the barn. They were a lumpy, dwarfish variety with the look of hairy goblin-dogs, the Murtre Mountain strain. In a panic Etzwane leapt from the tree and set off through the woods toward the river Lurne. If luck were with him, he would find a boat or a raft, for he could not swim.

Leaving the forest, he crossed a field of purple moy; looking back, his worst fears were realized: the ahulphs came behind.

So far they had not sighted him; they ran with their eyes and foot-noses to the ground. With pounding legs and bumping heart Etzwane ran from the field, up the high road which paralleled the river bank.

Along the road came a high-wheeled carriage, drawn by a prime pacing bullock, the result of nine thousand years breeding.

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Though capable of a very smart pace, it moved in a leisurely fashion, as if the driver were in no great hurry to reach his destination. Etzwane pulled up the old jacket to hide his bare neck and called to the man who drove the carriage: "Please, sir, may I ride with you for a little bit?"

The man, reining the pacer to a halt, gave Etzwane a somber appraisal. Etzwane, returning the inspection, saw a lean man of indeterminate age, with a pallid skin, a high forehead and an austere nose, a shock of soft white hair neatly cropped, and wearing a suit of fine gray cloth. The verticals of his torc were purple and gray; the horizontals were white and black, neither of which Etzwane could identify. He seemed very old, knowing and urbane, and yet, on the other hand, not very old at all. He spoke in a voice of neutral courtesy: "Jump aboard. How far do you go?"

"I don't know," said Etzwane. "As far as possible. To be quite frank, the ahulphs are after me."

"Indeed? What is your crime?"

"Nothing of any consequence. The farmer boys consider me a vagabond, and want to hunt me down."

"I can't very well assist fugitives," said the man, "but you may ride with me for a bit."

"Thank you."

The cart moved down the road, with Etzwane keeping a watch behind. The man put a toneless question: "Where is your home?"

Etzwane could trust no one with this secret. "I have no home."

"And where is your destination?"

"Garwiy. I want to put a petition to the Faceless Man, to help my mother."

"And how would he do this?"

Etzwane looked over his shoulder; the ahulphs were not yet in sight. "She is under unjust indenture and now must work in the tannery. The Faceless Man could order her indenture lifted; I'm sure she has paid it off and more, but they keep no reckonings."

"The Faceless Man is not likely to intervene in a matter of canton law."

"I've been told so. But perhaps he'll listen."

The man gave a faint smile. "The Faceless Man is gratified that canton law functions effectively. Can you believe that he'll disrupt old customs and turn everything topsy-turvy, even at Bashon?"

Etzwane looked at him in surprise. "How did you know?"

"Your gown. Your way of speech. Your mention of a tannery."

Etzwane had nothing to say. He looked over his shoulder, wishing the man would drive faster.

Even as he looked, the ahulphs bounded out into the road. Crouching down, Etzwane

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watched, in sweating fascination. Through some peculiar working of their brain, a loss of scent confused them, and no amount of training or exhortation could persuade them to seek their quarry visually. Etzwane looked around at the man, who seemed more distant and austere than ever. The man said, "I won't be able to protect you. You must help yourself."

Etzwane turned back to watch the road. Over the hedge bounded the farmer's boys. The ahulphs made grinning disavowals, loping helpfully in one direction, then another. The boys gave a caw of rage at the helplessness of the ahulphs, then one saw the carriage and pointed. All began to run in hot pursuit.

Etzwane said anxiously, "Can't you drive somewhat faster? Otherwise they will kill me."

The man looked stonily ahead, as if he had not heard. Etzwane gave a despairing glance behind, to find his pursuers gaining rapidly. His life was coming to an end. The ahulphs, with license to kill, would rend him apart at once, then carefully tie the parts into parcels to take home, quarreling over this and that as they did so. Etzwane jumped from the carriage, to tumble head over heels into the road. Scraped and bruised, but feeling nothing, he sprang down the river bank, bursting through the alders and into the swift, yellow Lurne. What now? He had never swam a stroke in his life . . .

Silence on the bank: a sinister absence of sound. Etzwane's legs began to feel numb; cautiously he edged himself into the thicket. The disturbance attracted attention; one of the boys set up a halloo. Etzwane fell back into the water and, missing his grip on the twigs, was carried off into the stream. Straining to hold up his head, beating down with his arms, thrashing with his legs, Etzwane floundered out into midstream. His breath came in harsh gasps, water entered his mouth to choke him; he felt himself going down. The opposite bank was not too far away. He made a desperate final effort; one of his feet touched bottom. He pushed to thrust himself hopping and lurching toward the bank. Kneeling in the shallows, clinging to the alders, he hung his head and gave himself up to hoarse, racking coughs. From the far bank the boys jeered at him, and the ahulphs began to thrust down through the alders. Etzwane wearily tried to push through the brush, but the bank beyond loomed high and steep above him. He waded with the current. One of the ahulphs jumped into the stream and paddled directly toward Etzwane; the current carried him past. With all his force Etzwane threw a chunk of water-sodden timber. It struck the hairy dog-spider head; the creature

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keened and moaned and retreated to the opposite bank. Etzwane half waded, half hopped with the current, the boys and ahulphs keeping pace along the other bank. Suddenly they all ran forward pell-mell. Looking down the stream, Etzwane saw a five-arched stone bridge and beyond, the town. His pursuers intended to cross the bridge and come down the bank at him. Etzwane gauged the stream; he could never swim back across. He made a ferocious attack on the alders, ignoring scratches, jabs, cuts; at length he pulled himself to the bank, a vertical rise of six feet, overgrown with fern and thorn-grass. He scrambled halfway up, to fall moaning back into the alders. Once again he tried, clinging with fingernails, elbows, chin, knees. By the most precarious of margins he crawled up and over, to lie flat on his face at the edge of the riverside lane. He could not rest an instant. Glassy-eyed, he heaved himself first to his hands and knees, then to his feet.

Only fifty yards away the town began. Across the lane, in a wooded park, he saw a half dozen carts, painted in gay symbols of pale pink, white, purple, pale green, blue.

Etzwane staggered forward, flapping his arms; he ran up to a short, sour-faced man of middle age, who sat on a stool sipping hot broth from a cup.

Etzwane composed himself as best he could, but his voice was tremulous and hoarse. "I am Gastel Etzwane, take me into your troupe. Look, I wear no torc. I am a musician."

The short man drew back in surprise and irritation. "Get along with you; do you think we clasp every passing rascal to our bosoms? We are adepts; this is our standard of excellence; go dance a jig in the market square."

Down the road came the ahulphs and behind them the farm boys.

Etzwane cried, "I am no rascal; my father was Dystar the druithine; I play the khitan." He searched wildly about; he saw a nearby instrument and seized it. His fingers were weak and water soaked; he tried to play a run of chords and produced only a jangle.

A black-furred hand grabbed his shoulder and pulled; another took his arm and jerked another direction; the ahulphs fell to disputing which had touched him first.

The musician rose to his feet. He grasped a length of firewood and struck furiously at both ahulphs. "Goblins, be off! Do you dare touch a musician?"

The peasant youths came forward. "Musician? He is a common thief, a vagabond. We intend to kill him and protect our hard-earned goods."

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The musician threw down a handful of coins. "A musician takes what he needs; he never steals. Pick up your money and go."

The farm boys made surly sounds and glared at Etzwane. Grudgingly they picked the coins up and departed, the ahulphs yelping and dancing sideways. Their work was for nought; they would receive neither money nor meat.

The musician once more settled upon his stool. "Dystar's son, you say. What a sorry letdown. Well, it can't be helped. Throw away those rags; have the women give you a jacket and a meal. Then come let me see what is to be done."

6

Clean, warm, full of bread and soup, Etzwane came cautiously back to Frolitz, who sat at a table under the trees, a flagon of liquor at his elbow. Etzwane sat down on a bench and watched. Frolitz fitted a new reed to the mouthpiece of a wood horn. Etzwane waited. Frolitz apparently intended to ignore his presence.

Etzwane hitched himself forward. "Do you intend to let me stay with the troupe, sir?"

Frolitz turned his head. "We are musicians, boy. We demand a great deal from each other."

"I would do my best."

"It might not be good enough. String up that instrument yonder."

Etzwane took up the khitan and did as he was bidden. Frolitz grunted. "Now tell me how Dystar's son runs the fields in rags?"

"I was born at Bashon in Canton Bastern," said Etzwane. "A musician gave a khitan to my sister, which I learned to play as best as I could. I did not care to become a Chilite and I ran away."

"That is a lucid exposition," said Frolitz. He scowled down at Etzwane. "I make serious demands upon my folk; we are not slackers here . . . what if I send you away?"

"I will go to Garwiy and ask the Faceless Man to give me a musician's torc and to help my mother as well."

Frolitz looked up at the sky. "What illusions the young harbor nowadays! So now the Faceless Man indulges every ragamuffin who comes to Garwiy with a grievance!"

"He must heed grievances; how else can he rule? Surely he wants the folk of Shant to be content!"

"Hard to say what the Faceless Man wants . . . But it's not good policy talking. He might be listening from behind that wagon, and he's said to be thin skinned. Look yonder on the tree. Only last night, while I slept fifty feet away, that placard was posted! It gives an eerie feeling."

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Etzwane examined the placard. It read:

The ANOME is Shant!
Shant is the ANOME!
Which is to say:
The ANOME is everywhere!
Sly sarcasm is folly.
Disrespect is sedition.
With benevolent attention!
With fervent zeal!
With puissant determination!
The ANOME works for Shant!

Etzwane nodded soberly. "This is exactly correct. Who posted it?"

"How should I know?" snapped Frolitz. "Perhaps the Faceless Man himself. If I were he, I'd enjoy going about making guilty folk jump. Still it's not wise to attract his notice with petitions and demands. If they are right and reasonable—so much the worse."

"What do you mean?"

"Use your head, lad! Suppose you and the canton have come into conflict, and you want matters altered. You go into Garwiy and present a petition which is right and proper and just. The Faceless Man has three choices. He can accommodate you and put the canton into an uproar, with unknown consequences. He can deny your just petition and expect sedition every time you get drunk in a tavern and start to talk. Or he can quietly take your head."

Etzwane pondered. "You mean that I shouldn't take my grievance to the Faceless Man?"

"He's the last man to take a grievance to!"

"Then what should I do?"

"Just what you're doing. Become a musician and make a living complaining of your woe. But remember: complain of your own woe! Don't complain of the Faceless Man! . . . What's that you're playing now?"

Etzwane, having strung the khitan, had touched forth a few chords. He said, "Nothing in particular. I don't know too many tunes, only what I learned from the musicians who came along the road."

"Halt, halt, halt!" cried Frolitz, covering his ears. "What are these strange noises, these original discords?"

Etzwane licked his lips. "Sir, it is a melody of my own contriving."

"But this is impertinence! You consider the standard works beneath your dignity? What of the repertory I have labored to acquire? You tell me now that I have wasted my time, that henceforth I must attend only the outpourings of your natural genius?"

Etzwane at last was able to insert a disclaimer. "No, no, sir, by no means! I have never been able to hear the famous works. I was forced to play tunes I thought up myself."

"Well, so long as it doesn't become an obsession . . . Not so much thumb there. What of the

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rattle-box? Do you think it's there for show?"

"No sir. I hurt my elbow somewhat today."

"Well, then, why scratch aimlessly at the khitan? Let's hear a tune on the wood horn."

Etzwane looked dubiously at the instrument, which was tied together with string. "I've never had the sleight of it."

"What?" Frolitz gaped in disbelieving shock. "Well, then, learn it! The tringolet, the clarion, the tipple as well. We are musicians in this troupe, not a set of theorizing dilettantes. Here, take this wood horn; go play scales. After a bit I'll come by and listen . . ."

A year later Master Frolitz brought his troupe to Garwiy, a locality the wandering troupes visited but seldom, for the urban folk of Garwiy enjoyed novelty, style and topical substance in preference to music. Etzwane, paying no heed to Frolitz's advice, went to the Corporation Plaza and stood in line at the booth where petitions to the Faceless Man might be filed for five florins. A placard reassured those who waited:

> All petitions are seen by the ANOME! The same scrupulous judgment is applied to the problems of all, if their petition costs five or five hundred florins. Be concise and definite, state the exact deficiency or hardship, specify the precise solution you propose. Merely because you are filing a petition does not indicate that your cause is just; conceivably you are wrong and your adversary right. Be instructed, rather than disappointed, should the Anome yield a negative response. The ANOME administers equity, not bounty!

Etzwane paid his five florins, received a form from the desk. In the most careful language he stated his case, citing the cynicism of the Chilites in respect to the indentures of the women. "In particular, the lady Eathre has more than paid her obligation to the Ecclesiarch Osso Higajou, but he has assigned her to work in the tannery. I pray that you order this injustice terminated, that the lady Eathre may be free to select the future course of her life without reference to the wishes of Ecclesiarch Osso."

Occasionally the five-florin petitions encountered slow responses; Etzwane's, however, received a verdict on the following day. All petitions and their responses were deemed in the public interest and posted openly on a board. With trembling fingers Etzwane unclipped the response coded with his torc colors.

The response read:

> The ANOME notes with sympathy a son's concern for

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the welfare of his mother. The laws of Canton Bastern are definite. They require that before an indenture can be considered paid, the indentured person must display a receipt and balance sheet for all monies paid over by the person and all charges incurred and debited against the same person's account. Sometimes a person consumes food, lodging, clothing, education, entertainment, medicine, and the like, in excess of his or her earnings, whereupon the payment of an indenture may be delayed. Such is possibly true in the present case.

The judgment is this: I command the Ecclesiarch Osso Higajou, upon presentation of this document, to render free the person of the lady Eathre, provided that she can show a favorable balance of one thousand five hundred florins, or if some person pays in cash to Ecclesiarch Osso Higajou one thousand five hundred florins, when it will be assumed that a previous balance between credit and debit exists.

In short, take this document and one thousand five hundred florins to Ecclesiarch Osso; he must deliver to you your mother, the lady Eathre.

With hope and encouragement,

THE ANOME

Etzwane became furiously angry. He instantly purchased a second petition and wrote: "Where can I get one thousand five hundred florins? I earn a hundred florins a year. Eathre has paid Osso twice over; will you lend me one thousand five hundred florins?"

As before the response was prompt. It read:

> The ANOME regrets that he cannot lend either private or public funds for the settlement of indentures. The previous judgment remains the definitive verdict.

Etzwane wandered back to Fontenay's Tavern, where Frolitz made his Garwiy headquarters, and wondered how or where he could lay his hands on one thousand five hundred florins.

Five years later, at Maschein in Canton Maseach, on the south slope of the Hwan, Etzwane encountered his father Dystar. The troupe, coming into town late, was at liberty for the evening. Etzwane and Fordyce, a youth three or four years older—Etzwane was now about eighteen—wandered through town, from one tavern to the next, gathering gossip and listening with critical ears to what music was being played.

At the Double Fish Inn they heard Master Rickard Oxtot's Gray-Blue-Green Interpolators.

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During an intermission Etzwane fell into a discussion with the khitan-player, who minimized his own abilities. "To hear the khitan played in proper fashion, step across the way to the Old Caraz and listen to the druithine."

Fordyce and Etzwane presently crossed to the Old Caraz and took goblets of effervescent green punch. The druithine sat in a corner, gazing moodily at the audience: a tall man with black-gray hair, a strong nervous body, the face of a dreamer dissatisfied with his dreams. He touched his khitan, tuned one of the strings, struck a few chords, listened as if displeased. His dark gaze wandered the room, rested on Etzwane, passed on. Again he began to play: slowly, laboriously working around the edges of a melody, reaching here, searching there; testing this, trying that, like an absent-minded man raking leaves in a wind. Insensibly the music became easier, more certain; the lank themes, the incommensurate rhythms, fused into an organism with a soul: every note played had been preordained and necessary.

Etzwane listened in wonder. The music was remarkable, played with majestic conviction and a total absence of effort. Almost casually, the druithine imparted heartbreaking news; he told of golden oceans and unattainable islands; he reported the sweet futility of life, then, with a wry double beat and an elbow at the scratch-box, supplied solutions to all the apparent mysteries. The music dwindled and departed into silence, like a caravan passing over the horizon.

Fordyce leaned over, put a question to one who sat nearby: "What is the druithine's name?"

"That is Dystar."

Fordyce turned marveling to Etzwane. "It is your father!"

Etzwane, with no words to say, gave a curt nod.

Fordyce rose to his feet. "Let me tell him that his natural son is here, who plays the khitan in his own right."

"No," said Etzwane. "Please don't speak to him."

Fordyce sat down slowly. "Why not, then?"

Etzwane heaved a deep sigh. "Perhaps he has many natural sons. A good number may play the khitan. He might not care to give polite attention to each of these."

Fordyce shrugged and said no more.

Once more Dystar struck at his khitan, to play music which told of a man striding through the night, halting from time to time to muse upon one or another of the stars.

For a reason Etzwane could not define, he became uncomfortable. Between himself and this man whom he did not know existed a tension. He had no claim against him; he could reproach him for

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no fault of omission or commission; his debt to Eathre had been precisely that of all the other men who had stepped into her cottage from Rhododendron Way; like the others he had paid in full and gone his way . . . Etzwane made no attempt to fathom the workings of his mind. He made an excuse to Fordyce, and departed the Old Caraz. In a deep depression he wandered back to camp, Eathre's image before his mind.

He brought forth his khitan. Sitting on the steps of the cart, he began to play the slow music, pensive and melancholy, to which the folk of Canton Ifwiy liked to step their pavanes . . . The music sounded dry, contrived, lifeless. Remembering the supple, urgent music which surged from Dystar's khitan as if it had its own life, Etzwane became first grim, then sad, then bitterly angry—at Dystar, at himself . . . He put up the khitan and laid himself into his bunk, where he tried to order his whirling young mind.

Another five years passed. Master Frolitz and the Pink-Black-Azure-Deep Greeners, as he now called his troupe, came to Brassei in Canton Elfine, not a great distance from Garwiy. Etzwane had grown into a slight, nervously muscular young man, with a face somber and austere. His hair was black, his skin darkly sallow; his mouth hung in a slightly crooked droop. He was neither voluble, gay nor gregarious; his voice was soft and spare, and only when he had taken wine did he seem to become easy or spontaneous. Certain of the musicians thought him supercilious, others thought him vain. Only Master Frolitz sought out his company, to the puzzlement of all, for Frolitz was warm where Etzwane was cold, forward where Etzwane stepped aside. When taxed with his partiality, Frolitz only scoffed; for a fact he found Etzwane a good listener, a wry and taciturn foil to his own volubility.

After establishing camp on Brassei Common, Frolitz, with Etzwane for company, made the rounds of the city's taverns and music halls, to learn the news and solicit work. During the late evening they came to Zerkow's Inn, a cavernous structure of old timber and whitewashed marl. Posts supported a roof of a dozen crazy angles; from the beams hung mementoes of all the years of the inn's existence: grotesque wooden faces blackened by grime and smoke, dusty glass animals, the skull of an ahulph, three dried cauls, an iron meteorite, a collection of heraldic balls, much more. At the moment Zerkow's was almost deserted, due to the weekly rigor ordained by Paraplastus, the local Cosmic Lord of Creation. Frolitz approached Loy the innkeeper and made his proposals.

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While the two chaffered, Etzwane stood to the side, absent-mindedly studying the placards on the posts. Preoccupied with his own concerns, he observed nothing of what he read. This morning he had received a large sum of money, an unexpected sum which had substantially augmented his savings. Sufficiently? For the twentieth time he cast up a reckoning; for the twentieth time he arrived at the same figure, on the borderline between adequacy and inadequacy. Yet where would he get more? Certainly not from Frolitz, not for a month or more. But time passed; with his goal so near he itched with impatience . . . His eyes focused on a bulletin printed in the brown and black of emergency:

> Warning! Take care! Several large bands of Roguskhoi have recently been observed along the slopes of the Hwan! These noxious creatures may not be approached, at sure peril of your life!

Frolitz and Loy came to mutually satisfactory terms. In recognition of the understanding, Loy served out free tankards of green cider. Etzwane asked, "When was the black-brown put up?"

"About the Roguskhoi? Two or three days ago. They made a raid down into Canton Shalloran and kidnaped a dozen women."

"The Faceless Man should act," said Etzwane. "The least he can do is protect us; isn't that his function? Why do we wear these torcs otherwise?"

Frolitz, conversing with a stranger in traveler's clothes who had just entered the tavern, took time to speak over his shoulder: "Pay no heed to the lad; he has no knowledge of the world."

Loy, puffing out his fat cheeks, ignored Frolitz instead. "It's no secret that something must be done. I've heard ugly reports of the creatures. It seems that they're swarming like ants up in the Hwan. There aren't females, you know, just males."

"How do they breed?" Etzwane wondered aloud. "It is a matter I can't understand."

"They use ordinary women, with great enthusiasm, or so I'm told, and the issue is always male."

"Peculiar . . . Where would such creatures come from?"

"Palasedra," declared Loy wisely. "You must know the direction of Palasedran science: always breeding, always forcing, never satisfied with creatures the way they are. I say, and others agree, that an unruly strain slipped out of the Palasedran forcing houses and crossed the Great Salt Bog into Shant. To our great misfortune."

"Unless they come to spend their florins at Zerkow's!" Frolitz called down the bar. "Since

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they're great drinkers, that's the way to handle them: keep them in drink and in debt."

Loy shook his head. "They'd drive off my other trade. Who wants to bump beakers with a red-faced demon two feet taller than himself? I say, order them back to Palasedra, without delay."

"That may be the best way," said Frolitz, "but is it the practical way? Who will issue the order?"

"There's an answer to that," said Etzwane. "The Faceless Man must exert himself. Is he not omnipotent? Is he not ubiquitous?" He jerked his thumb toward the placards. "Such are his claims."

Frolitz spoke in a hoarse whisper to the white-haired stranger. "Etzwane wants the Faceless Man to go up into the Hwan and torc all the Roguskhoi."

"As good a way as any," said Etzwane with a sour grin.

Into the tavern burst a young man, a porter employed at Zerkow's. "Have you heard? At Makkaby's warehouse, half an hour ago, a burglar got his head taken. The Faceless Man is nearby!"

Everyone in the room looked around. "Are you certain?" demanded Loy. "There might have been a swash-trap set out."

"No, without question: the torc took his head. The Faceless Man caught him in the act."

"Fancy that!" Loy marveled. "The warehouse is only a step down the street!"

Frolitz turned to lean back against the bar. "There you have it," he told Etzwane. "You complain: 'Why does not the Faceless Man act?' Almost while you speak he acts. Is not that your answer?"

"Not entirely."

Frolitz swallowed half a tankard of the strong green cider and winked at the stranger: a tall thin man with a head of soft white hair and an expression of austere acquiescence toward the vicissitudes of life. His age was indeterminate; he might have been old or young. "The burglar suffered a harsh fate," Frolitz told Etzwane. "The lesson to be learned is this: never commit an unlawful act. Especially, never steal; when you take a man's property, your life becomes forfeit, as has just been demonstrated."

Loy rubbed his chin with uneasy fingers. "In a sense, the penalty seems extreme. The burglar took goods, but lost his life. These are the laws of Elfine which the Faceless Man correctly enforced—but should a bagful of goods and a man's life weigh so evenly on the balance?"

The white-haired stranger offered his opinion. "Why should it be otherwise? You ignore a crucial factor in the situation. Property and life are not incommensurable, when property is measured in terms of human toil. Essentially property is life; it is that proportion of life which an individual

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has expended to gain the property. When a thief steals property, he steals life. Each act of pillage therefore becomes a small murder."

Frolitz struck the bar with his fist. "A sound exposition, if ever I heard one! Loy, place before this instructive stranger a draught of his own choice, at my expense. Sir, how may I address you?"

The stranger told Loy: "A mug of that green cider, if you please." He turned somewhat upon his chair, toward Frolitz and Etzwane. "My name is Ifness; I am a traveling mercantilist."

Etzwane gave him a sour look; his rancor toward the man in the pacer trap had never waned. Ifness then was his name. A mercantilist? Etzwane had his doubts. Not so Frolitz. "Odd to hear such clever theories from a mercantilist!" he marveled.

"The talk of such folk is often humdrum," agreed Loy. "For sheer entertainment, give me the company of a tavern-keeper."

Ifness pursed his lips judiciously. "All folk, mercantilists as well as tavern-keepers and musicians, try to relate their work to abstract universals. We mercantilists are highly sensitive to theft, which stabs at our very essence. To steal is to acquire goods by a simple, informal and inexpensive process. To buy identical goods is tedious, irksome and costly. Is it any wonder that larceny is popular? Nonetheless, it voids the mercantilist's reasons for being alive; we regard thieves with the same abhorrence that musicians might feel for a fanatic gang which beat bells and gongs whenever musicians played."

Frolitz stifled an ejaculation.

Ifness tasted the mug of green cider which Loy had set before him. "To repeat: when a thief steals property, he steals life. For a mercantilist, I am tolerant of human weakness, and I would not react vigorously to the theft of a day. I would resent the theft of a week; I would kill the thief who stole a year of my life."

"Hear, hear!" cried Frolitz. "Words to deter the criminal! Etzwane, have you listened?"

"You need not single me out so pointedly," said Etzwane. "I am no thief."

Frolitz, somewhat elevated by his draughts of cider, told Ifness, "Quite true, quite true! He is not a thief, he is a musician! Owing to the virtue of my instruction, he has become an adept! He finds time for nothing but study. He is master of six instruments; he knows the parts to two thousand compositions. When I forget a chord, he is always able to call out a signal. This morning, mark you, I paid over to him a bonus of three hundred florins, out of the troupe's instrument fund."

Ifness nodded approvingly. "He seems a paragon."

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"To a certain extent," said Frolitz. "On the other hand, he is secretive and stubborn. He nurtures and nurses every florin he has ever seen; he would breed them together if he could. All this makes him a dull dog at a debauch. As for the three hundred florins, I long ago had promised him five hundred, and decided to stint him for his cheerlessness."

"But will not this method augment his gloom?"

"To the contrary; I keep him keen. As a musician he must learn to be grateful for every trifle. I have made him what he is, at least in his better parts. For his faults you must cite a certain Chilite, Osso, whom Etzwane claims as his 'soul-father.' "

"On my way east I will be passing through Canton Bastern," said Ifness politely. "If I encounter Osso, I will convey him your greetings."

"Don't bother," said Etzwane. "I am going to Bashon myself."

Frolitz jerked around, to focus his eyes on Etzwane. "Did I hear correctly? You mentioned no such plans to me!"

"If I had, you would not have paid me three hundred florins this morning. As a matter of fact, I just made up my mind ten seconds ago."

"But what of the troupe? What of our engagements? Everything will be discommoded!"

"I won't be gone long. When I return you can pay me more money, since I seem to be indispensable."

Frolitz raised his bushy eyebrows. "No one is indispensable save myself! I'll play khitan and wood horn together, if I feel so inclined, and produce better music than any four fat-necked apprentices!" Frolitz banged his mug on the bar by way of emphasis. "However, to keep my friend Loy satisfied, I must hire a substitute—an added expense and worry. How long will you be gone?"

"Three weeks, I suppose."

"Three weeks?" roared Frolitz. "Are you planning a rest-cure on the Ilwiy beach? Three days to Bashon, twenty minutes for your business, three days back to Brassei: that's enough!"

"Well enough, if I traveled by balloon," said Etzwane. "I must walk or ride a wagon."

"Is this more parsimony? Why not go by balloon? What is the difference in cost?"

"Something like thirty florins each way, or so I would guess."

"Well then! Where is your pride? Does a Pink-Black-Azure-Deep-Greener travel like a dog-barber?" He turned to Loy the publican. "Give this man sixty florins, in advance, on my account."

Somewhat dubiously Loy went to his till. Frolitz took the money and clapped it down on the bar in front of Etzwane. "There you are;

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be off with you. Above all, do not let yourself be deceived by other troupe-masters. They might offer more money than I pay, but be assured, there would be hidden disadvantages!"

Etzwane laughed. "Never fear, I'll be back, perhaps in a week or ten days. I'll take the first balloon out; my business at Bashon will be short enough, then it's the first balloon back to Brassei."

Frolitz turned to consult Ifness, but found an empty chair; Ifness had departed the tavern.

A storm had struck in from the Green Ocean, bringing floods to Cantons Maiy and Erevan; a section of the Great Transverse Route had been washed out; balloons were delayed two days, until crews were able to rig an emergency passover.

Etzwane was able to secure a place on the first balloon out of Brassei, the *Asper*. He climbed into the gondola and took a seat; behind him came other passengers. Last aboard was Ifness.

Etzwane sat indifferently, making no sign of recognition. Ifness saw Etzwane, and after the briefest of hesitations nodded and sat down beside him. "It seems that we are to be traveling companions."

Etzwane made a cool response. "I will find it a pleasure."

The door was closed; the *Asper* rose into the air and surged ahead, with taut guys and singing dolly.

Ifness spoke to Etzwane: "You seem totally relaxed. Have you ridden the balloon-way before?"

"Many years ago."

"A wonderful experience for a child."

"It was indeed."

"I am never altogether comfortable in the balloons," said Ifness. "They seem so frail and vulnerable. A few sticks, the thinnest of membranes, the most fugitive of gases. Still, the Palasedran gliders seem even more precarious: transport no doubt which accords with their temperament. You are bound for Bashon, I understand."

"I intend to pay off my mother's indenture."

Ifness reflected a moment. "Perhaps you should have entrusted your business to a job-broker. The Chilites are a devious folk and may try to mulct you."

"No doubt they'll try. But it won't do any good. I carry an ordinance from the Faceless Man, which they must obey."

"I see. Well, I still would be on my guard. The Chilites, for all their unworldliness, are seldom bested."

After a moment Etzwane said, "You seem well acquainted with the Chilites."

Ifness permitted himself a faint smile. "They are a fascinating cult; the Chilite rationale and its physical projection makes a most elegant pattern. You don't follow

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me? Consider: a group which nightly intoxicates itself into a frenzy of erotic hallucinations, under the pretext of religious asceticism—isn't this sublime insouciance? A social machinery is necessary to maintain this state of affairs: it is as you know. How to ensure persistence in a group not itself regenerative? By recruiting the children of other men, by the constant infusion of new blood. How to secure so precious a commodity, which other men protect with their lives? By the ingenious institution of Rhododendron Way, which also turns a good profit. What marvelous effrontery! It can almost be admired!"

Etzwane was surprised to find Ifness so enthusiastic. He said coldly, "I was born on Rhododendron Way and became a Pure Boy; I find them disgusting."

Ifness seemed amused. He said, "They are a remarkable adaptation, if perhaps too highly specialized." He took a journal from his valise, *The Kingdoms of Caraz,* and began to read.

Late the next afternoon, the *Asper* arrived at Angwin, at the head of the Great Gorge, and descended to discharge those passengers who were to continue along the North Spur but who must now put up the night at Angwin Inn. There were four of these: Etzwane, a pair of commerical buyers bound for Dublay at the tip of Canton Cape, and Ifness.

The suns toppled low, one behind the other; magenta light struck Mount Mish and the far peaks beyond. The gorge became dim with murk. Etzwane and the buyers drank spiced cider; Ifness had gone for a stroll along the rim of the chasm. One of the buyers asked the steward, "Do you see many Roguskhoi down in the gorge?"

"Not often," the steward replied. "The lads up at Junction used to see a few, but from what I hear they've migrated east into the Wildlands."

"They raided down in Shalloran not so long ago," said the second buyer. "That's to the west."

"Yes, so it is. Well, it's all beyond me. What we'd do if a band attacked Angwin, I can't imagine."

The other buyer spoke. "The gorge itself is some protection, so I should think."

The steward looked gloomily down into the blue murk. "Not enough to suit me, if what I hear of the devils is true. If we had women up here, I wouldn't sleep nights. They hardly go out of their way to kill a man, except for entertainment, but if they smell a woman, they climb through fire and flood. In my opinion something ought to be done."

Ifness, who had returned unobserved, spoke from the shadows. "What, in your opinion, is the 'something' that ought to be done?"

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"The Faceless Man should be notified and have it driven home to him, that's what! I say, throw a cordon around the whole Hwan, if it takes every man in Shant, and then start closing in, driving the devils together, killing as we go. When men from the north, east, south and west look at each other over the top of Mount Skarack, then we'll know we're rid of the vermin."

One of the buyers demurred. "Too complicated; it would never work. They'd hide in caves or tunnels. Now, my idea is to put out poison—"

The other buyer offered a lewd specification for efficacious bait.

"Well, why not," demanded his colleague, "if it'll draw them? But poison's the answer, mark my words."

The second buyer said, "Don't be too sure! These are not animals, you know. They're freak men, from across the Salt Bog. The Palasedrans have been quiet too long; it's unnatural, and now they're sending in the Roguskhoi."

The steward said, "I don't care where they come from; let's clear them out, back to Palasedra for preference. According to the afternoon news, just in over the radio, a band came down from Mount Haghead to raid a village in Morningshore Canton. Killed, raped, kidnaped. The village is ruined."

"So far to the east?" murmured Ifness.

"That's the report. First Shalloran to the west, then Morningshore to the east. The Hwan must be crawling with them."

The steward inquired, "Do you gentlemen require more drink before supper? If so, call out now, before cook strikes the gong."

Etzwane asked, "Is Dagbolt still superintendent?"

"No, old Dagbolt's been dead five years of throat chancre," replied the steward. "I knew him a mere three months, more than ample. Dickon Defonso is superintendent, and affairs go tolerably well."

"Does a certain Finnerack work at Angwin?

"Finnerack? Somewhere I've heard the name . . . But he's not here."

"Might he be at Junction?"

"Nor at Junction. Finnerack . . . Some sort of scandal. Was he the criminal who loosed a balloon?"

"I couldn't say."

In the middle of the morning the balloon *Jano* arrived at Angwin. The four passengers climbed aboard; the *Jano* rose to the extent of its guys and was pulled back across the gorge to Junction. Etzwane gazed down in fascination at the little island in the sky. There: the three great sheaves, almost in contact, there the stone shelter with the timber door and the outhouse cantilevered over the

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gorge. At the sheave he saw the motion of the man on duty; the balloon gave a jerk as the claw-jack drew down the guys and the grip was transferred to the North Spur cable, and another jerk as the jack was released. Etzwane smiled as he thought of another balloon, so long ago . . .

The *Jano* was drawn down to the North Station; the guys were transferred to a dolly; then off down the slot into Canton Seamus ran the *Jano,* tacking into a brisk breeze off the starboard bow. With the balloon trimmed to best advantage, the wind-tender came into the gondola. "All here for Oswiy, I take it?"

"Not I," said Etzwane. "I'm for Bastern Station at Carbade."

"Bastern Station? I'll put you down if the landing crew is on hand. They took themselves into Carbade during the raid."

"What raid is this?"

"You wouldn't have heard. The Roguskhoi, a band of fifty or sixty, pushed out of the Wildlands and plundered down the Mirk."

"How far down the Mirk?"

"That I don't know. If they turned toward Seamus, you won't find a crew at Bastern Station. Why not go on down to Ascalon? You'd find it more secure."

"I must get off at Bastern Station, if I slide down the guys."

The crew at Bastern Station had returned to duty; the balloon was hauled down with a nervous jerkiness. Etzwane jumped to the ground; Ifness followed. "I take it that you are traveling east?" asked Ifness.

"Yes, to Bashon."

"I propose then that we share a vehicle."

Etzwane calculated his probable expenses. Fifteen hundred florins for the indenture, a hundred for the return to Brassei with Eathre, another fifty for unforeseen contingencies. Sixteen hundred and fifty. He carried sixteen hundred and sixty-five. "I can't afford anything expensive," he said in a somewhat surly voice. Of all the folk of Shant, he least of all wished to be under obligation to Ifness. Save perhaps his soul-father Osso.

At the hostelry, Ifness ordered a fast trap, drawn by a pair of prime pacers. "I'll have to take two hundred florins from you," the hostler told Ifness. "That is the deposit. Hire will be twenty florins a day."

Etzwane said flatly, "I can't afford it." Ifness made an indifferent gesture. "It is how I choose to travel. Pay what you can; I will be satisfied."

"It's not much," said Etzwane. "Fifteen florins, in fact."

"Well enough, well enough, let us be off, I am anxious to inspect the Roguskhoi, if circumstances offer."

The pacers, tall rangy beasts, deep and narrow-chested, long

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and fine in the legs, sprang off down the road; the trap whirled after them.

Etzwane glowered at Ifness from the corner of his eye. A strange man, for a fact. Etzwane had never seen another like him. Why should he want to inspect the Roguskhoi? There seemed no sensible reason for such an interest. If a Roguskhoi were dead and lying beside the road, Etzwane would pause to examine the corpse, from natural curiosity; but to go about the business so purposefully—it seemed sheer lunacy!

Ten miles they drove, up and down the rolling hills of Seamus. Along the road from the east came a man on a thrust-cycle, wearing the red cap of invisibility. He rode at the best speed he could muster, lying flat on the pallet, buttocks surging and jerking as he kicked at the ratchet.

Ifness pulled the trap to a halt and watched the man's approach. A discourteous act, thought Etzwane: the man wore red. The cyclist swerved to pass by. Ifness called him to a halt, to the man's displeasure. "Why do you molest me? Have you no eyes in your head?"

Ifness ignored his agitation. "What is the news?"

"Dreadful news; don't stay me; I'm off to Canton Sable or beyond." He made as if to hump the cycle into motion once more. Ifness called out politely, "A moment, if you please. No danger is visible. From what are you fleeing?"

"From the Roguskhoi, what else? They burnt Salubra Village; another band pillaged the Chilites. For all I know they're close on my heels! Delay me no longer; if you're wise you'll turn about and flee west!" The man thrust his cycle into motion and was gone along the road to Carbade.

Ifness turned to look at Etzwane. "Well, what now?"

"I must go to Bashon."

Ifness nodded, and without further remark, whipped up the pacers. They entered Bastern; ahead appeared the shadow of Rhododendron Way. From behind the hill rose a column of smoke. As they entered Rhododendron Way, Ifness slowed the trap to a more cautious pace, inspecting the shadows under the trees, the berry coverts, the hillsides, with an alertness Etzwane had not noticed in him before . . . All seemed normal, save for the utter silence. The lavender-white sunlight lay in irregular sprinkles along the white dust. In the garden of the first cottage purple and magenta geraniums bloomed among spikes of lime-green ki. The door of the cottage hung askew. Across the threshold lay the body of a man, face obliterated by a terrible blow. The girl who had lived in the cottage was gone.

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A gap through the trees revealed the temple. Along the upper terraces a few Chilites moved slowly, tentatively, as if trying to convince themselves that they were alive. Ifness touched up the pacers; the trap whirled up the hill toward the temple. From the embers of the tannery and women's dormitory rose the column of smoke they had seen from far off. The temple and its conjoined structures seemed to be whole. Etzwane, standing up in the trap, looked all around. He saw no women, young or old.

Ifness halted the trap before the temple portico. From the terrace above, a group of Chilites, haggard and uncertain, peered down.

Ifness called up: "What has happened?"

The Chilites stood like ghosts in their white robes. "Hello up there!" called Ifness with acerbity in his voice. "Can you hear me?"

The Chilites moved slowly back out of sight, as if toppling over backward, thought Etzwane.

Several minutes passed. The three suns performed their majestic gyrations across the sky. The stone walls baked in the glare. Ifness sat without motion. Again, with sharper puzzlement, Etzwane wondered why Ifness troubled himself to such an extent.

The iron gates moved ajar, to reveal a group of Chilites. He who had opened the gate was a round-faced young man, somewhat portly, with overlarge features, scant sandy hair and a full sandy beard. Etzwane on the instant recognized Geacles Vonoble. Behind stood half a dozen other Chilites, among them Osso Higajou.

Ifness spoke sharply, "What has occurred here?"

Osso said in a voice that rasped as if bitter phlegm choked his throat. "We are victims of the Roguskhoi. We have been pillaged; they have done us vast harm."

"How many were there in the band?"

"No less than fifty. They swarmed at us like savage beasts! They beat on our doors; they brandished weapons; they burnt our structures!"

Etzwane could restrain himself no longer. "How long ago did they depart?"

"No more than an hour; they herded the women into a file: young and old, infants excepted; these they threw into the tannery vats. We are now bereft."

Geacles stared at Etzwane, then turned and muttered to Osso, who came forward three quick steps.

Ifness, coldly polite, put another question. "Which way did they go?"

"Up the Mirk Valley, the way they had come," said Geacles.

Osso pointed a finger at Etzwane. "You were the Pure Boy Faman Bougozonie, who committed foul acts and fled."

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"My name is Gastel Etzwane. I am the son of Dystar the druithine. My mother is the lady Eathre."

Osso spoke in a menacing voice: "Why did you come here?"

"I came to dissolve my mother's indenture."

Osso smiled. "We do not engage in such casual traffic."

"I carry an ordinance from the Faceless Man."

Osso grunted. Geacles said smoothly, "Why not? Pay us our money; the woman will be released to you."

Etzwane made no response. He turned to look up Mirk Valley, where he had never ventured for fear of ahulphs. The women would walk at less than three miles an hour. The Roguskhoi had departed an hour since. Etzwane thought furiously. He looked toward the tannery: destroyed, burnt to the ground. The far sheds where chemicals and dyes were stored still stood. He turned to Ifness and spoke in a low voice: "Will you lend me the trap and the pacers? If I lose them I will pay; I carry sixteen hundred florins."

"Why do you require the trap?"

"So that I may save my mother."

"How?"

"It depends upon Osso."

"I will lend you the trap. What are a pair of pacers, after all?"

Etzwane spoke to Osso: "The Roguskhoi are great wine-drinkers. Give me two large kegs of wine. I will convey them up the valley and deliver them."

Osso blinked in bewilderment. "You intend to assist their revelries?"

"I intend to poison them."

"What?" cried Geacles. "And so provoke another attack?"

Etzwane looked to Osso. "What do you say?"

Osso calculated. "You plan to deliver the wine in the trap?"

"I do."

"What will you pay for the wine? It is our ceremonial liquor; we have none other."

Etzwane hesitated. Time was too precious to be used haggling; still, if he offered generously, Osso would ask more. "I can only offer thirty florins a cask."

Osso gave Etzwane a cold glance. Ifness lounged indifferently against the trap. Osso said, "That is not enough."

Ifness said, "It is ample. Bring forth the wine."

Osso examined Ifness. "Who are you?"

Ifness looked unsmilingly off over the valley. Presently he said, "In due course the Faceless Man will move against the Roguskhoi. I will inform him of your refusal to cooperate."

"I have refused nothing," rasped Osso. "Give me your sixty florins, then go to the door of the storeroom."

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Etzwane paid over the coins. Two casks of wine were rolled forth and loaded into the back of the trap. Etzwane ran over to the chemical storehouse, looked along the lines of jugs and packets. Which would serve his purpose best? He did not know.

Ifness entered the shed. He glanced along the shelf and selected a canister. "This will serve best. It has no remarkable flavor and is highly toxic."

"Very well." They returned to the trap.

"I will be gone at least six hours," said Etzwane. "If possible, I will bring back the trap, but as to this—"

"I paid a large deposit for the use of the trap," said Ifness. "It is a valuable piece of equipment."

With compressed lips, Etzwane brought forth his pouch. "Will two hundred florins suffice? Or as many as you wish, to sixteen hundred."

Ifness climbed into the seat. "Put away your florins. I will come along to protect my interests."

Wordlessly Etzwane sprang aboard; the trap moved off up Mirk Valley. From the terraces of the temple the Chilites stood watching until the trap passed from view.

The road was little more than a pair of wheel tracks beside the Mirk River. Ifness drove at the best pace the road allowed: the trap bounced, bumped, swung from side to side, but still moved three times the best possible speed of the Roguskhoi and the women.

Ifness asked after a few minutes, "Where does the road lead?"

"Up to Gargamet Meadow—that's what the Chilites call it. It's the plantation where they grow their galga bush."

"And how far to Gargamet Meadow?"

"Five or six miles from here, at a guess. I would expect the Roguskhoi to stop at Gargamet Meadow for the night."

Ifness pulled in the pacers. "We don't want to overtake them in this gully. Have you poisoned the wine?"

"I'll do so now." Etzwane climbed into the rear of the trap and poured half of the canister into each keg.

The suns passed behind the western slope; the valley began to grow dim. A sense of imminence pressed down on Etzwane; the Roguskhoi could not be too far ahead. Ifness drove with great caution; to blunder into a Roguskhoi rearguard would not serve their purposes. Ahead the road passed through a notch with tall coral-trees silhouetted on the sky at either side. Ifness stopped the cart; Etzwane ran ahead to reconnoiter. The road, passing through the notch, swung around a clump of purple-pear trees, then eased out upon a flat. To the left

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loomed a grove of dark bawberrys; to the right the galga plantation spread: sixty acres of carefully tended vines. Beside the bawberry grove a pond reflected back the lavender sky; here the Roguskhoi marshaled their captives. They had just arrived; the women were still moving as the Roguskhoi directed, with great roaring commands and sweeps of their huge arms.

Etzwane signaled back to Ifness, who brought the trap forward to the clump of purple-pears. With pinched nostrils Ifness looked across the flat. "We can't be too transparent in our scheme," he told Etzwane. "We must contrive natural movements."

Etzwane's nerves began to draw and grate. He spoke in a high-pitched rasping voice: "Any minute they'll start in on the women! They can hardly contain themselves."

Indeed, the Roguskhoi now surrounded the women, making tremulous motions, surging toward the shrinking huddle, then drawing back.

Ifness inquired, "Can you ride a pacer?"

"I suppose so," said Etzwane. "I've never tried."

"We will drive across the meadow furtively, as if hoping to evade attention. As soon as they see us—then you must be quick, and I as well."

Etzwane, terrified but desperately resolved, nodded to Ifness' instructions. "Anything, anything . . . We must hurry!"

"Haste provokes disaster," chided Ifness. "We have just arrived; we must take account of every circumstance." He appraised and considered another ten seconds, then drove out on the edge of the meadow, and turned toward the plantation, away from the bawberry grove. They moved in full view of the Roguskhoi, should one by chance remove his glance

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from the ashen-faced women.

They drove a hundred yards, attracting no attention; Ifness nodded in satisfaction. "It would seem now as if we are hoping to escape their notice."

"What if they don't see us?" asked Etzwane in a thin voice he hardly recognized as his own.

Ifness made no response. They drove another fifty yards. From the Roguskhoi came a yell, hoarse yet wild, with a peculiar crazy timbre that started up the hairs behind Etzwane's neck.

"They have seen us," said Ifness in a colorless voice. "Be quick now." He jumped down from the cart with no undue haste and unsnapped the traces from one of the pacers; Etzwane fumbled with the straps of the other pacer. "Here," said Ifness, "take this one. Climb upon its back and take the reins."

The pacer jerked at the unaccustomed weight.

"Ride for the road," said Ifness. "Not too fast."

Twenty of the Roguskhoi lumbered across the meadow, eyes distended, arms flailing and pumping, a fearful sight. Ifness ignored them. He snapped loose the traces on the second pacer, cut short the reins, tied them deliberately, jumped upon the pacer's back. Then, kicking it in the ribs, he sent the beast loping after Etzwane.

The Roguskhoi, sighting the casks, forgot the fugitives; with hardly a pause in their stride they lifted the tongue of the trap; cavorting in a particularly grotesque fashion, they drew it back across the meadow.

In the shadow of the purple-pears Ifness and Etzwane halted the pacers. "Now," said Ifness, "we must wait."

(to be concluded next month)

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"I suppose the least we can do is name the damned thing after poor Dembar."

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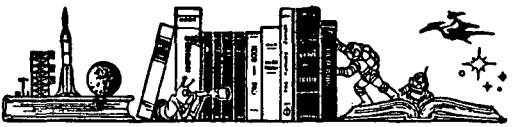
BOOKS



Madame X presents, in an intensified form, a common problem of movie interpretation. Children sometimes interpret movies in terms of what they see on the screen, and the adults with them often try to explain what they are *supposed* to see, so that the children will be able to follow the plot . . . In general, the wider the gap, the less the connection the movie has with art or talent or any forms of honesty . . .

Pauline Kael, KISS KISS BANG BANG, Bantam, 1969, p. 150

Stage life is artificially simple and well understood by the masses; but it is very stale; its feeling is conventional; it is totally unsuggestive of thought because all its conclusions are foregone . . . Real life, on the other hand, is so ill understood, even by its clearest observers, that no sort of consistency is discoverable in it; there is no "natural justice" corresponding to that simple and pleasant concept, "poetic justice"; and, as a whole, it is unthinkable. But, on the other hand, it is credible, stimulating, suggestive, various, free from creeds and systems—in short, it is real.

George Bernard Shaw, "A Dramatic Realist to His Critics," *The New Review*, London, July 1894.

Ira Levin, the author of ROSEMARY'S BABY, has written a science fiction novel called SON OF BRAVE NEW WORLD—sorry, I mean THIS PERFECT DAY (Random House, $6.95) which is 309 pages long. It has a pretty cover and there are a lot of characters in it. It is a tidy and comfy book, smooth as Crisco from beginning to end, and if I sound unduly nasty, please keep in mind that I am not after Ira Levin in particular. I wish to shoot down a whole class of bad, bad writing and to do that, one might as well take a shot at one of the best examples, if rottenness can be said to have a best and a worst. "All its conclusions are foregone" says Shaw, above, and when you say that, you have said what is (to my mind) more morally damning than anything about implausibility or awkwardness or lack of skill. THIS PERFECT DAY makes science fiction written by science fiction writers look amazingly eccentric; I never realized what a freaky bunch we are, or what a strong impression of real, individual minds at work one gets from even the worst science fiction. I might add that a bad book written by a human being is infinitely preferable to a "perfect" book apparently written by a sales chart.

Mr. Levin's pale monster of a novel takes the saccharine, pas-

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sive, affect-less, drugged world of Huxley and reduces it to very weak tea indeed. For some reason, "our Ford" and "our Freud" (Huxley's witty and compact comment on us) are changed to Marx, Christ, and two other persons whose significance or cultural contribution is never explained. The society is coercive in a saccharine, "unselfish," very modern way—what the devil has Marx to do with this kind of togetherness? The blandness of the hero's experience is evoked very well at first, but when he manages to duck his required drugs and starts "coming alive" (the name of the second part out of four of the novel), the prose remains exactly the same, and the character's perceptions remain exactly the same. It is all very sensible, very detailed, and very thorough, but there is not the slightest intensity, the slightest vividness of characterization, the slightest trace of dramatic climax, the slightest exploration of the moral and social problems raised by such a society (or the slightest offering of alternatives), nor is anything in the book genuinely or vividly visualized. THIS PERFECT DAY (like *Gone With the Wind*) gives the impression that a truly momentous climax is brewing just around the corner—only read on, read on, and before you know it, you're in the end papers. There are no low points, but there are no high points, either; in fact there are no points at all, and you can put the book down and pick it up anywhere.

How many times can one take apart a commercial mechanism? Readers are timid, so the book is very slow; readers want value for money, so the book is very long; readers have no background, so the book avoids explaining anything technical; readers are not literate, so the style is simple; readers like sex but are conservative, so the sex is mild. Readers (you, dear reader) are stupid, so the hero's final "sophistication" barely approaches that of the feeblest member of the audience. Mr. Levin has made up or found (it really doesn't matter; in science fiction ideas are free because what really matters can't be patented) some of the Godawfullest clichés of our poor field—the women in this society have *no breasts*, for example (does he have any idea of the hormonal manipulations necessary for this?) except for the heroine, of course, (!) and you know the hero is a *throwback* (ha ha) because he has one green eye and one brown eye. This is a crude sort of genetic determinism to find in a book that's trying to be a paean to individuality—but never mind; read Pauline Kael (above) and you'll understand. There is, of course, the usual reward for good morality, i.e. good sex (a liberal cliché if there ever was one; I'm

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tempted to write it Goodsex, like Orwell), and naturally there is nary a whisper as to what sort of social system is to replace the bad one. Mr. Levin doesn't want to be moral; he only wants to be pious.

In BRAVE NEW WORLD, Huxley's loyalties are divided and hence there is some inner drama; Huxley is interested in real life and hence there are real people. But why go on? THIS PERFECT DAY is readable only in the way that the kind of movie Pauline Kael talks about is seeable—in terms of what we know we are supposed to see, not what is really there.

This is a lot of animus to direct against a fat, smooth, harmless bestseller (you may say), but I have become convinced that these fat pets are genuinely vicious en masse, and that the habit of lazily accepting "supposed to be" for "is" is responsible for a lot worse things than a few hours in a hammock with Ira Levin's latest. Let me quote Algis Budrys in the December 1968 issue of *Galaxy*:

> Characterization and motivation in commercial writing . . . [are] there in predigested form, or if not the fact itself, then its inevitable consequences. In order to hit fast with it, get it done and get out, you and the reader both simplify . . . "I know better, but . . . for entertainment's sake I'll go along with *their* belief." . . . But implicit in this blithe surrender is an acknowledgement, right there at the heart of the process, that the process is of no consequence.

Certainly minor matters can be of little consequence; Poul Anderson (as I've had occasion to mention before) jerry-builds the beginnings of his stories. But THIS PERFECT DAY is jerry-built all through, and like ROSEMARY'S BABY, *pretends* to mull over deep moral problems. It is a thoroughly complacent book. Other readers (stupid readers, not like all of you who are proving your wisdom by reading me) will come up to us at parties and actually want to talk about the moral problems posed by THIS PERFECT DAY—as though there were any! This is the kind of habit we laugh at when it involves only books; but go read the recent collection of writings done by children in Harlem schools, where it involves human lives, and then look long and hard at the title of the collection: THE WAY IT SPOZED TO BE.

Ralph Blum, author of THE SIMULTANEOUS MAN (Atlantic-Little Brown, $5.95) may be suffering from Levin's Disease, but then again he may just be inexperienced. The book jacket promises that "This Book Is Based On Fact" and I suppose it is: people do spend most of their lives opening file folders and then shutting them, looking at desks, looking away from desks, drinking

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drinks, drumming their fingers, lighting cigarettes, going from this place to that place, being aware of the rooms they're in, driving in automobiles, drying their hands, washing their hands, turning lights on, turning them off, and so on. But they really ought not to spend whole novels doing almost nothing else. What the book jacket meant, I suspect, is that the brain-washing described in the novel is actually being practiced by our government. If Mr. Blum has the slightest evidence that anything like that is going on, he ought to go directly to *Evergreen Review, The Realist, Life, The NY Times*, and any and all underground publications he can find and holler cop as loud as he possibly can. To put such stuff in a bad novel is foolish and cowardly. But there I go again—actually trying to believe the story, as if it were a real construct that existed. Technically THE SIMULTANEOUS MAN is very bad—Mr Blum uses the worst point of view imaginable for his material—that of the omniscient author—and his story bucks badly: seemingly endless exposition followed by a spurt of plot, another huge chunk of exposition and another spurt of plot, *und so weiter*. There are lots of characters one never gets to know, and a description of a brain operation which fails completely to convey the moral horror of what is being done. I tried to separate relevant from irrelevant detail only to decide that all the detail was irrelevant—the book is full of irritating bits like "He was aware of a pulse in his left temple" which seem to be indices of emotion, but which somehow never succeed in making clear just what sort of emotion. There are also bits of material that are peculiarly scattered, sentences in which a reader is asked to visualize material without the proper background or is given the background in the second part of the sentence when he needs it in the first. An example, p. 13:

> Through the scrub-room window, they could see into the green-tiled operating room where Art Ballard, already gowned, was filling a syringe.

This exasperating, jump-about stuff is all through THE SIMULTANEOUS MAN. I suspect that like most big publishing houses making their first venture into science fiction, Atlantic-Little Brown simply lost all judgment and assumed that anything would do just as a famous colleague of mine at Cornell once expressed astonishment at my knowing any science. "When you need a scientific explanation in one of those stories, you just make it up, don't you?" he said. The science in Mr. Blum's book is not only inaccurate but stupefyingly inconsistent; he's as bad as A. E. van Vogt but without the charm. THE SIMULTANEOUS

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MAN is about faking memory; the way this is done is to question subject A while A is under drugs (the perfect drug having been discovered), then have a troupe of actors re-enact A's life. Their re-enactments are filmed. Subject B, his own memories having been surgically eradicated is then "fed" the film of A's memories at very high speed while he (Subject B) is under the same perfect drug. Subject B then becomes a duplicate of Subject A. Mr. Blum doesn't seem to have considered the time it would take a troupe of real actors to re-enact *thirty-odd years* of a man's life (even allowing for time spent during sleep) or the lack of all senses except sight and hearing. For a long time science fiction has assumed that the only way to transfer memories is through direct electrical patterning and this still seems to me inherently much more sensible, despite the fact that both methods are now impossible. Halfway through THE SIMULTANEOUS MAN, Mr. Blum's A and B go into telepathic contact—this is neither explained nor used as part of the plot. B apparently falls apart because he does not match his memories physically (he is black, A is white), but there are also suggestions that the presence of the original "pulls" at the twin like "a magnet"—we never find out the real cause.

Apparently the visual/auditory tape is played to the subject during a kind of enforced catatonia, but in the novel A watches B's eyes *during* input—so just where is the input put in? If it's direct electrical stimulation of the brain, then I go back to my original objection.

There is a young lady put in the novel for the hero, A, to have Goodsex with but who seems otherwise totally unnecessary. She is a surprising character, however: "Her face was amazing: still buoying Lehebokov on the outgoing tide of her thoughts, her mind was shifting to Horne and he felt the drag and rush of feeling." (p. 226)

The book jacket tells us that the author's parents "were movie people" and that THE SIMULTANEOUS MAN is his second book. I'll hazard a guess and say that Mr. Blum does not know the first thing about writing fiction, that he is trying to write a film or TV script without realizing it and that he is an intelligent man whose idea of writing fiction is to put down everything in the character's field of vision—and that is no idea at all.

All this, mind you, is directed at the publisher, not at the writer. A publishing house which goes into s.f. without some experienced person on its staff is heading for trouble: either incoherent drek or slick blandness. A few hints of government nasties and a lot of

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file cabinets and tiled floors do not a novel make; nor does one old idea and lots of padding. Nor are the usual rules of consistency, economy, good writing, and good sense suspended in our field because "you just make that stuff up."

On page 115 of THE SIMULTANEOUS MAN there is a beautiful translation of a poem by Alexander Blok. I take it this is Mr. Blum's (no credit is given otherwise). Anybody who can write those curiously Brechtian stanzas ought not to waste his time producing mimic novels. Starve or teach like the rest of us.

THE DARK SYMPHONY by Dean R. Koontz (Lancer, 75¢) is a silly, ritualistic adventure story of Rebellious Hero in Repressive Society. There is no pretense about the book; all is as economical, ridiculous, and flamboyant as can be. It will probably be morally corrupting to adolescents who take it seriously, but it is so stripped-down an example of its kind that I can't imagine anyone taking it seriously. There are as few scenes in the book as is compatible with the plot's moving at all: Hero in Arena (with background of Bad Society), Hero with Rebellious Mutants, Revolution, Hero Beating Up Best Friend, Hero and Heroine Escaping to New Land. It is rather silly and lurid ("bloodlust in every cell") but it is unpretentious and quirky, and it has all the glomph of the stories we told ourselves when we were twelve. It also has a Women's Lib heroine, ta-rah! (well, sort of). There is one good idea: Manbats (known as bat-men to other writers). Mind you, it's only bearable in comparison with THIS PERFECT DAY and THE SIMULTANEOUS MAN, but it's unabashed trash and will do to prop up a table leg.

SEA HORSE IN THE SKY by Edmund Cooper (Putnam, $4.95) has surprisingly pleasant, understated characters in a thoroughly impossible frame; I suspect the book was never thought through or rewritten. The Desert Island ploy is one of the easiest to set up in literature and one of the hardest to resolve: sixteen people wake up in front of a hotel on a strange world; there is food and water and a road that leads nowhere; who—or what—is conducting an experiment? Mr. Cooper's people are interesting and his alien "stage-set" (for several groups of quasi-humans are being kept in this way) convincingly blank and eerie. The trouble with this sort of thing is that the resolution of the mystery (whose experiment and for what purpose) has to be a humdinger, and Mr. Cooper had nothing plausible or even moving to hand, so he brings the curtain down on one of the flattest denouements of all time. It is nei-

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ther impressive nor plausible, and what's worse, it is in no way a dramatic resolution of what's gone before. It's simply arbitrary and it completely spoils the novel.

Otherwise there is a charming Stone Age couple, the good sense and matter-of-factness of the other characters, and a certain low-keyed good humor. As Mr. Cooper has set up his plot, however, the end must justify the preceding mystification, and the end here is just nothing.

—JOANNA RUSS

VAMPIRES

So tender to the light it breaks them—
sunset rising, midnight's their noon,
earth's ancients following cock's call
home to sleep. They cannot take death
too seriously, who half-live each
borrowed day, alone in a shuttered room,
slender of face and eyes sensibly shut,
though stake and cross shake their dreams.
Sir and Lady, hide quickly your pale daughters
at dark's drawing on. These shapes
frequent old mansions where no mirror
may touch that softest step,
nor will dust or cobweb break as they glide
upon a play of dreams, and prey towards blood.
At one touch all hungers turn simple,
indifferent to dying. Linked to wolf's cry,
small as a bat upon the night wind,
still they fear the forms good men
bear against them, so do not ask
for pity ever. Yet if mischance
find their eyes seared in a blaze of first sun,
or if villages of arms all waving Christ
drive one back upon his coffin's lid,
go easy with your stake, sir.
Pain sits on their hearts, heavy as ours.

—LAWRENCE RAAB

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Bob Shaw is an Irishman, a journalist, the author of the much anthologized story "Light of Other Days" and, more recently, a novel, SHADOW OF HEAVEN *(Avon). His first story for F&SF is a hugely entertaining account of two fanatical and purposeful moviegoers, one human, the other alien.*

REPEAT PERFORMANCE

by Bob Shaw

THE TROUBLE CAME TO A HEAD when they picked on Milton Pryngle.

Do you remember him? In old movies he was usually the harassed, exasperated hotel clerk. He was short and dapper, with a petulant round face and an exquisite slow burn which I have always considered the equal of Edgar Kennedy's. And when they picked on him, they had gone too far.

Perhaps I'm wrong about when this mess started. Perhaps, if I was one of these people who think deeply about causes and effects—like my projectionist, Porter Hastings—I would say it all began in my childhood. I was a fanatical moviegoer from the age of seven and before reaching high school had already decided that the only business worth considering was owning a theater. Twenty years later I finally made it and, although I hadn't foreseen the effects of things like color television, was still convinced it was the best life in the world. Mine is a small suburban theater—a stucco cube which had once been white and now is an uncertain yellow, with streaks of saffron where the gutters are particularly bad—but I make sure it's clean inside, and my choice of repertory movies attracts a steady flow of customers.

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There are plenty of old films on television, but they get chopped up too much, and any connoisseur knows that the only way to appreciate their flavor is in the original nostalgic atmosphere of the stalls.

Anyway, the trouble sneaked up on me a month or so ago—in disguise. I was standing beside the box office watching the midweek crowd trickle out into the blustery darkness. Most of the faces were familiar to me, and I was nodding good-night to about every other one when C. J. Garvey shuffled past me, turned up his coat collar, and disappeared through the outer door. His name probably doesn't mean anything to you, but C. J. Garvey was a bit player in upwards of a hundred undistinguished movies, always as a kindly, worldly-wise pawnbroker. I doubt if he ever spoke more than three lines, but anytime a script called for a kindly, worldly-wise pawnbroker, Garvey was automatically the man.

I was surprised to discover that he was still alive, and amazed to find him going to a movie in a small-town theater in the Midwest. The thing which really got me, however, was the magnitude of the coincidence—the main feature that night was *The Fallen Rainbow*, and Garvey was in it, playing his usual role. Filled with a sentimental yearning to let the old guy know his movie career had not gone entirely unnoticed, I hurried out onto the front steps, but there was no sign of him in the windy, rain-seeded night. I went back in and met Porter Hastings coming down the stairs from the projection room. He appeared worried.

"We had that dim-out tonight again, Jim," he said. "That's the third Wednesday night in a row."

"It can't have been serious—there weren't any complaints." I was in no mood for technical trivialities. "Do you know who walked out through that door just a minute ago? C. J. Garvey!"

Hastings looked unimpressed. "It's as if there was some kind of a power drain. A real massive one which sucks all the juice out of my projectors for a few seconds."

"Listen to what I'm saying, Port. C. J. Garvey had a bit part in *The Fallen Rainbow*—and he was in our audience tonight."

"Was he?"

"Yes. Just think of the coincidence."

"It doesn't seem much of a coincidence to me. He was probably passing through town, saw that one of his old movies was showing here, and stopped by to have a look at it. Straightforward cause and effect, Jim. What I'd like to know is what goes on around here on Wednesday nights to overload the power supply like that. Our regulars will be noticing these dim-outs and getting the idea I can't handle the job."

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I started to reassure him, but just then old Mr. and Mrs. Collins came shuffling out into the lobby. They both have rheumatism and so are usually the last to leave the building before we close the doors. Sometimes, when their twinges are worse than usual, they complain a bit about drafts, or it might be smoke or someone crunching popcorn too loudly, but I don't mind. My business is built upon people feeling as comfortable and relaxed in the theater as if they were at home, and the regulars are entitled to have their say about things.

"Good night, Jim," Mrs. Collins said. She hesitated, obviously with something on her mind, then came a little closer to me. "Have you started selling seaweed?"

"Seaweed?" I blinked. "Mrs. Collins, it's years since I have even *seen* a piece of seaweed. Do people actually go around buying and selling it?"

"The edible kind they do. And if you're going to start selling that smelly stuff in the kiosk, Harry and me aren't coming back. We can just as easy go to the Tivoli on Fourth Street, you know. Dulce you call the kind you eat."

"Don't worry," I said seriously. "As long as I'm running this theater, not one piece of dulce will ever cross the threshold." I held the door open while they hobbled through, then I turned back to Hastings, but he had disappeared back up into his den. By that time the place was empty except for staff, so I went into the auditorium for a final look around. There's a sad, musty atmosphere in a movie house after everybody has gone home, but this time something extra had been added. I sniffed deeply, then shook my head. Who, I thought, would be crazy enough to bring seaweed to the movies?

That was the first Wednesday night to go slightly off key—C. J. Garvey's night—but it wasn't till the following one that I began to get an uneasy feeling there was something queer going on in my theater.

It was another rainy evening and a pretty good crowd had come in to see *Island Love* and the main feature, *The Fighting Fitzgeralds*. I was standing in my favorite spot, a niche in the rear wall where I can see all of the auditorium and watch the screen at the same time, when one of the dim-outs which annoyed Hastings so much occurred. It happened near the end of the show when another of my favorite bit players, Stanley T. Mason, was on the screen. Mason never became a 'star' bit player—which is what I call that handful of lesser actors whose names always crop up when people who think they know a lot about old movies start to chew the fat—but he turned in quite a few gem-like

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performances in B features, usually as something like an English remittance man exiled in the States. He was lecturing one of the Fighting Fitzgeralds on the value of good breeding, in his superbly reedy British accent, when the picture faded to near blackness for a good three seconds. Some of the audience were starting to get restive when the screen flickered and brightened to its former intensity. I breathed a sigh of relief and relaxed—complete shutdowns are bad for business, more because of the loss of audience confidence than the issue of a houseful of complimentary tickets.

Just then it came back. The seaweed smell, I mean. I sniffed it incredulously for a minute, then walked down the center aisle and used my flash to see if I could catch some health food crank *flagrante delicto*. Everything seemed normal enough; so I went back out to the lobby to think things over. The smell seemed to cling in my nostrils, an odor of . . . *not* seaweed, I suddenly realized, but of the sea itself. At that moment the main feature ended and the crowd began to pour out, those in the vanguard blinking suspiciously at the real world outside as if something might have changed during their absence in another dimension. I stood to one side and was bidding the regulars good-night when Porter Hastings came clattering down the projection room stairs.

"It happened again," he said grimly.

"I know." I nodded, keeping my gaze on the departing patrons, picking out the faces I'd known for years—Mr. and Mrs. Carberry; old Sam Keers, who was so regular that he even came in the day of his wife's funeral; short-sighted Jack Dubois, who always sat in the front row; Stanley T. Mason . . .

"What are you going to do about it?" Hastings demanded.

"I don't know, Port. That's your side of . . ." My voice faded away. *Stanley T. Mason!* I had just seen one of the actors in *The Fighting Fitzgeralds* walking out of my theater from a showing of his own film.

"We can talk technicalities in the morning," I said, moving away. "There's somebody over there I want to see."

"Hold on, Jim." Hastings grabbed my arm. "This is serious. There might be a fire risk, because . . ."

"Later!" I broke away and shouldered through the crowd to the door, but it was too late. Mason had disappeared into the breezy darkness of the street. I went back inside to where Hastings was waiting with a hurt look on his face.

"Sorry," I said, trying to put my thoughts in order, "but there's

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something weird going on here, Port." I reminded him about having seen C. J. Garvey the previous Wednesday and was telling him about Stanley T. Mason when a fresh thought struck me. "And I'll tell you something else. He was wearing the same clothes as in the film—one of those tweed overcoats with the big herringbone pattern you don't see any more."

Hastings looked unimpressed, as usual. "It's a television stunt or something. Hidden cameras, old-time actors forgotten by the millions they used to entertain. What's worrying me is this smell of ozone around the place."

"Ozone?"

"Yeah—allotropic oxygen. You get it floating around after there's been a massive electrical discharge. That's why . . ."

"That's the stuff you smell at the seaside?"

"So I'm told. I'm worried about a short circuit, Jim. That power has got to be going somewhere."

"We'll get it sorted out somehow," I assured him absent-mindedly. My brain was slowly getting into gear and had just come up with another brand-new thought, one which gave me an inexplicable cold feeling under my belt. It's easier to spot people when they are going *into* a movie house, because they enter in ones and twos. I had been in the lobby both Wednesday nights when the place was filling up, and I could swear that neither Garvey nor Mason had gone into my theater.

But I had seen them coming out!

On the way back to my apartment that night I stopped in at Ed's Bar for a couple of relaxers, and the first person I saw was big Bill Simpson, a reporter on the *Springtown Star*. I know him pretty well because when he does movie reviews for the paper he calls in at my office and borrows the promotional handouts. As far as I know, he never actually attends any of the films he writes about unless they happen to be science fiction or horror.

"Have a drink, Jim," he called from his stool at the bar. "What are you looking so worried about, anyway?"

I let him buy me a bourbon, then I bought a couple, and in between I told what had been going on. "Porter Hastings thinks somebody's working on a television program about has-been actors. What do you think?"

Simpson shook his head solemnly. "It's perfectly obvious to me what's happening, and I'm afraid it's rather more sinister than somebody making a candid camera movie."

"So what is it?"

"It's all part of a pattern, Jim. Remember that big meteorite which came down near Leesburg last month? At least, they said it

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was a meteorite—although nobody ever found a crater."

"I remember it," I said, beginning to suspect that Simpson was putting me on.

"Well, the *Star* carried a very strange story a couple of days later, and I think I'm the only person in the world who had the perspicacity to grasp its true significance. A farmer out that direction went out to inspect his prize hog the morning after the supposed meteorite fell, and what do you think he found in the pen?"

"I give up."

"*Two* prize hogs. Absolutely identical. His wife swears the second hog was there, too, but by the time one of our boys had got out there the second hog had vanished. I wondered what had happened to this mysterious creature—then you walked in here and filled in the gaps in its life story."

"I did?"

"Don't you see it, Jim?" Simpson drained his glass and signaled the bartender. "That so-called meteorite was a spaceship. Some kind of alien being came out of it, a being so hideous to look at that it would have been shot on sight, but it has one very valuable defense mechanism—it can mimic the shape of any other creature it sees. Having landed in farming country, it first of all made itself into the shape of the only native it could find—a hog.

"Then it got away and came into the city where, in order to get by, it has to assume the shape of a human being. It has to study its subject carefully while adopting its shape, which presents problems, but it discovered there was enough detail in movies for it to use actors as models, and it's nice and dark inside movie houses.

"So every week the alien comes along to your place, Jim. Perhaps to renew its memory of the human form, perhaps to select a different outward appearance so that it would be difficult to track down. In a way, I almost feel sorry for it."

"That," I said stonily, "is the greatest load of garbage I ever heard."

A look of indignation flitted across Simpson's round face. "Of course it is. What do you expect for one shot of cheap whiskey—the War of the Worlds? Set up some decent stuff and we'll really go to work on your problem." An hour later, when Ed threw us off the premises, we had decided that one of my Wednesday night regulars was a night club entertainer who was working up a good impersonation act. Or that I was suffering from a very special form of d.t.'s.

Apart from the hangover next morning, my jawing session with Bill Simpson did me a lot of good. Conscious of how ridiculous my formless fears had been, I worked

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efficiently for the rest of the week, got in a good day's fishing on Sunday, and was back on the job on Monday feeling great.

Then, on Wednesday night, I saw Milton Pryngle walking out of my theater. That was too much.

Because I happened to know that the magnificent Pryngle had died ten years earlier.

During the following week, I worried myself into the ground, using the best part of a bottle of whisky a day in the process, and by the time Wednesday came round again, I was in pretty bad shape. My poor condition was partly a result of excessive liquor consumption, but mainly it was because—so help me—I was beginning to believe Bill Simpson's first crazy theory, the one about the monster which changed shape.

Porter Hastings was no help at all. He is so unimaginative that I wasn't able to confide in him, and to make matters worse he had rung the power company on his own initiative. The result was that inspectors came snooping around, checking the power circuits and muttering darkly about closing me down for a week for a complete rewiring job. All I got in the way of real help from Hastings was confirmation that an image of Milton Pryngle had been on the screen during last Wednesday's dim-out. This convinced me that Simpson's alien was a reality and that it needed power to do its changing act—power which it somehow managed to suck out of the theater's supply. It also gave me the idea of setting a trap for the beast which was making such a mess of my affairs.

On Wednesday morning I went down and saw Hy Fink in the distributor's office on First Avenue. Knowing my taste in movies pretty well, he was a little surprised when I asked if he could let me have a print of any costume production, but after much consulting of hire schedules he fished out a copy of *Quo Vadis*. I thanked him fervently, ignoring the way he winced when my breath hit him, and hurried away with the cans under my arm.

I went to the theater earlier than usual and slipped upstairs to Hastings' projection room. Hastings doesn't like me fooling around with his gear, but I was in no state to worry unduly about his feelings. I put the first reel of *Quo Vadis* on the stand-by projector and fiddled around with it until a close-up of Robert Taylor in the uniform of a Roman officer was in the gate. Satisfied with my work, I went to my office, had another drink and rang the Springtown police station. It took only a few seconds to get through to Sergeant Wightman, an officer I'm on good terms with because I give him complimentaries for all the children's matinees.

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"Hello there, Jim," he boomed in a jovial voice, doubtless imagining I was giving out more tickets.

"Bart," I said carefully, "I'm having a bit of trouble here at the theater."

"Oh!" His voice immediately became wary. "What sort of trouble?"

"Well, it isn't very serious. It's just that most Wednesday nights this screwy character comes in for the last feature. He doesn't actually *do* anything—he just sort of puts on funny clothes while the show's running—but I'm a bit worried about him. Never know when somebody like that might go over the edge, do you?"

"Why don't you refuse to let him in?"

"That's the trouble—I'm not even sure what he looks like. He's normal enough on the way in, but when he's coming out, he could be dressed differently. He might even . . ." I swallowed painfully, ". . . be tricked out like a Roman centurion."

There was a lengthy silence. "Jim," Wightman said finally, "have you been drinking?"

I laughed. "At this time of the day? You know me better than that."

"All right. What do you want me to do?"

"Could you have a squad car in the district from say nine o'clock till ten forty-five when the crowd is leaving?"

"I suppose so," he said doubtfully. "But if this guy does show up, how will I know him?"

"I told you—he'll probably be wearing funny clothes. I have an idea that . . ." I laughed again, ". . . he looks a bit like Robert Taylor." When I set the phone down, I was perspiring freely, and it took two more drinks to get my nerves quieted.

Porter Hastings looked surprised when I followed him upstairs to the projection room. "Don't breathe on me," he said. "I want to keep a clear head for the night's work."

"I only had a quick one—is it noticeable?"

"I wish I could figure out what's eating you these days." His tone left no doubt he was pretty disgusted with me. "What do you want up here, Jim?"

"Ah . . . it's about the Wednesday night dim-outs."

His eyebrows rose a fraction of an inch. "What about them? I told you there'd be complaints."

"There haven't been any complaints as yet, and there aren't going to be any. I've found out what's causing the power drain."

He paused in the act of hanging up his jacket. "What is it?"

"This is a little awkward for me, Port. I can't explain it to you right now, but I know what we have to do to stop it for good." I gestured at the stand-by projector

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with the reel of *Quo Vadis* in place.

"What the . . . !" Hastings scowled resentfully at the projector as he realized that his domain had been invaded during his absence. "What have you been doing in here, Jim?"

I tried to smile casually. "Like I said, I can't explain it now, but here's what I want you to do. Have the stand-by projector warmed up, and at the very first sign of a dim-out tonight, cut your main lantern and switch over to the stand-by. I want this piece of film on the screen when the power starts to fade. Got it?"

"This is just crazy," he said moodily. "What difference will that particular piece of film make?"

"For you, a lot of difference," I promised him. "Because if it doesn't come on just the way I want it—you're fired."

The main feature that night was *Meet Me in Manhattan*—a movie which had an unusually large number of bit parts for Simpson's alien to choose from. During the supporting program, I stood in my niche at the back of the hall trying to reassure myself about the possible consequences of my plan. If the alien existed only in my fevered imagination, no harm would be done; and if it was real, I was doing a service for mankind by exposing it. Put like that, there was nothing to worry about, but the normally amiable dimness of the familiar hall seemed to be crawling with menace, and by the time the main feature started I was too jumpy to stay in one place.

I went out to the lobby and spent some time scanning the few late arrivals. Jean Magee, who runs the box office, kept staring through her window at me, so I walked outside to check that the squad car promised by Bart Wightman was in the vicinity. There was no sign of it. I debated trying to get him on the phone, then noticed a vehicle which might have been a police cruiser parked near the end of the block. It was raining a little, as is usual on a Wednesday night, so I turned up my collar and walked towards the car, glancing back at the theater every now and again. The incongruous architecture of the yellow cube looked more out of place than ever in the quiet street, and its neon sign fizzed fretfully in the rain, like a time bomb.

I was nearing the car when the reflections on the wet pavement and store windows dimmed abruptly. Spinning on my heel, I saw that the marquee lighting had faded out. The theater remained in darkness for a good ten seconds, longer than on previous Wednesdays, then the lighting came on strongly again.

Suddenly scared stiff, I sprinted towards the car and saw its

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police markings. One of the windows rolled down and a policeman stuck his head out.

"This way," I shouted. "This way."

"What's the trouble?" the officer demanded stolidly.

"I . . . I'll explain later." Just then I heard running footsteps and turned to see Porter Hastings belting towards me in his shirtsleeves. I began to get a ghastly premonition.

"Jim," he gasped. "You've got to get back there—all hell has broken out."

"What do you mean?" The question was rhetorical on my part, because I suddenly knew only too well what had happened. "Did you project that piece of film as I instructed?"

"Of course I did." Even under stress he still found time to look indignant at his professionalism being queried.

"The exact frames which were in the gate?"

He looked guilty. "Well, you didn't say anything about that. I ran a bit of the film to see what it was."

"And did you wind it back to the frames I wanted?" I asked anxiously.

There was no time—and no need—for him to answer, because at that moment a wild commotion broke out further down the street. The police officers in the car, Porter Hastings and I got a grandstand view of something which hasn't been seen on Earth for over fifteen hundred years—a Roman legion fighting its way out of a tight corner. Their helmets, shields and short swords glinted as they formed a tight square under the marquee, ready to take on all comers. And above their heads, with an irony I was in no mood to appreciate, my neon sign spelled out the word: COLOSSEUM.

"There must be an explanation for this," one of the policemen told me as he reached for his microphone to call headquarters, "and all I can say is, it had better be a good one."

I nodded glumly. Oh yes, I had a good enough explanation—but I had an uneasy feeling that my Wednesday night trade was ruined forever.

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A collection of Thomas M. Disch's stories (including three from F&SF) is due out in January from Doubleday; it's called FUN WITH YOUR NEW HEAD. *This new story comes on like a friendly, familiar beast, nuzzles you in the hand for a while, then heads straight for the jugular.*

The Beginning Of April Or The End Of March

by Thomas M. Disch

AN ORDINARY CUP OF COFFEE. The handle, aspiring for grace, was inconveniently small. A soft and tasteless Hostess doughnut shed powdered sugar on his fingertips. On the dark surface of the coffee he could see the reflection of the fluorescent fixture overhead, a trembling circlet of brightness with a single bite taken out of it. When he rose from the table, he would kiss his wife. His wife's name was Alice. Or Bernice. She sat across from him, holding a cup of tan coffee. His coffee, by contrast, was black. Yuban.

Her name was Bernice. Not Alice.

He rose from the table and kissed his wife.

"Have a nice day," Bernice said. She wore a housedress of blue cotton printed with pink and yellow flowers, while the kitchen curtains represented various kinds of fruits and vegetables: apples, bananas, pineapples, tomatoes, celery, squash.

The closet contained a black overcoat and a gray hat. He put these on and regarded himself in the mirror. His name was Mr. Brice. There was nothing unusual or very memorable about his face.

His wristwatch and the clock agreed that it was ten minutes after eight. The clock was a little house with twelve little people inside, one for each hour. From the Black Forest, Germany. At nine

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o'clock he would be sitting in his office, at his desk, ready to begin the day's work.

As he walked to his car, he wondered if a wristwatch would be a suitable birthday present for his wife. He wanted to get her something that would be a surprise, something distinctive. His car was a 1968 Dodge Coronet 500, or an Oldsmobile Toronado, with bucket seats. As was his custom, he fastened the safety belt across his shoulder and under his arm before starting the engine. He drove to the end of Muskegan Avenue, careful to avoid the new pothole, and turned left into Purdue, which led after a few blocks to Maine Boulevard. For some reason the neon sign above the bowling alley at the corner of Maine and Purdue was still burning. Often he would come here, on Thursday evenings, with his friends. It was a Thursday today. Perhaps he would go bowling this evening. It seemed possible.

His last name was Brian, not Brice. Lawrence Brian. People usually called him Larry. His friends did. And his wife's name was Bernice Brian. They had three or four children, and they lived in a house on Muskegan Avenue.

The ground mist along Maine Boulevard turned into rain, and he switched on the wipers. Though it was only the beginning of April and mounds of dirty snow were still to be seen in the gutters, it was too warm this morning for the heater.

He turned on the radio and listened to various songs.

At nine o'clock he was sitting in his office, at his desk, ready to begin the day's work. Miss Andrews, of the secretarial pool, peeked round the partition of gray metal and frosted glass. "Busy?" she asked. Miss Andrews wore, today, a short dress with stripes of violet and turquoise. She placed a large green paper cup on the glass surface of the desk. His coffee.

Every morning, at this hour, Miss Andrews would bring a cup of coffee and place it on his desk.

"No mail?" he asked.

"Not yet." Her smile extended the hope that there might be mail later. Despite her nose he found Miss Andrews relatively attractive.

"Maybe there won't be any today," he said.

She frowned. "Sometimes, you know, it doesn't come by till eleven."

He felt in his pocket for a quarter to pay for his coffee. The quarter represented George Washington, in profile. The word LIBERTY balanced on George Washington's wig. He placed the quarter on the corner of his desk beside a triangular prism of wood to which was affixed, with two screws, a plastic plaque engraved with his name. Mr. Ryan, his name.

Miss Andrews stood before the

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window, one hand resting on the beige ventilation unit. "Isn't the light funny today," she said.

Mr. Ryan looked out the window at the many windows of the building across the street. Although the quality of light seemed in no way strange or remarkable, he said, "It's the time of year. The springtime."

"Oh, you!" It was characteristic of Miss Andrews to pretend to put a romantic construction upon his most colorless remarks, but she was, despite this whimsical streak, a better-than-average stenographer. On the debit side, however, her spelling was erratic.

His coffee. He drank his coffee.

His appointments. March 31. 10 a.m. *Pol. Cont. Meeting, regional.* 1 p.m. *The Evergreen Grill, Andy B.*

The afternoon was free, and if he didn't take too long over lunch, there would be time to finish the report on the Policy Controls Meeting before five. Perhaps even earlier.

Barnes, of Coordination, phoned to discuss the pending Policy Controls Meeting. Barnes was a good man, but Mr. Ryan had little patience with the Coordination Department.

"Yes," he said. "Mm, yes, I'll remember that." As he shifted the receiver from one ear to the other, his eye was attracted by a framed photograph sitting on the glass of the desk just behind the tooled leather blotting pad. The woman in the photograph resembled his wife. Blonde. A turquoise dress. Ordinary face.

Her name was Bernice. Or Alexandra. Her name was Alexandra. They both, Ryan and this woman, lived in the same house on Muskegan Avenue. They had two children, two or three children, and these children, by contrast to the two adults, were smallish, as yet. Elsewhere on the desk there might be photographs of them.

"And how is Bernice?" Barnes asked.

"Oh, very well. Very well indeed."

"And you?"

"The same as ever." He looked from the photograph to the window, from the window to the partition of frosted glass. He looked at his wristwatch. It was almost time for the Policy Controls Meeting. He wondered if it would be better to go down the hall to the elevators or to use the stairs.

Later, in the elevator, the sound system played a familiar song. He tried to remember the words to it.

Alexandra poured out a second cup of coffee for him from the electric percolator. Ryan drank his coffee black, while his wife preferred hers with cream and sugar. Of, if there was no cream, with milk. The children were in the

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living room, viewing a domestic comedy on television. Ryan lifted the cup, pinching the tiny handle between his thumb and forefinger.

The walls were painted buff, the drapes were a sort of plaid. If Ryan had stood up and stretched his arm, he would have been able to touch the buff ceiling with his fingertips.

"A good day?" his wife asked.

"Hectic."

"The Policy Controls Meeting?" she asked sympathetically, for she took an intelligent interest in her husband's work.

"Yes, it dragged on and on. The new man from the Central Division, Anderson, likes to hear himself talk. I was late for lunch."

"Anderson, Anderson. . . . Have I met him? What's his first name?"

"Bruce, as I recall."

"Of course! He came to the Christmas party with that woman in the shiny turquoise dress. Was that his wife, do you suppose?"

"Yes, I believe she was."

"Would you like another cup of coffee?"

"No, thanks."

"And in the afternoon?"

"Barnes came around and kibitzed. He asked after you, by the way. I didn't have one free hour to begin the report on the meeting."

"Oh, you won't have to go in to the office tomorrow, will you? You shouldn't work *every* Saturday. Can't you do it on Monday?"

"I thought I'd try and get it out of the way tonight. After the children have gone to bed." He placed the coffee cup, empty now, into its gold-edged saucer. Alexandra poured some more coffee into the cup.

It was eight o'clock and a lady-in-waiting, or a princess, came out onto the platform of the German clock. Blonde. A long turquoise dress. She carried a small implement in her left hand that Ryan could not identify.

It was time for the news, and the children left the living room just as Ryan and his wife entered. Three children. The three children went into other rooms of the house and made noises.

The television showed Ryan the new 1968 Dodge Coronet 500. A beautiful young woman drove the Dodge Coronet 500 through pine forests, while a female chorus sang an appropriate song. Then the President delivered an important message. Then a bridge collapsed in West Virginia. Then Premier Papadopoulos assured Ryan that the government of Greece was prepared to meet every challenge. Then a small building burned near Bong Son. Then the announcer talked about Wall Street, where trading was unusually heavy. Then there was a short cartoon about Yuban Coffee, with music. Then a young woman showed Ryan and Alexandra a better wax for their kitchen floor.

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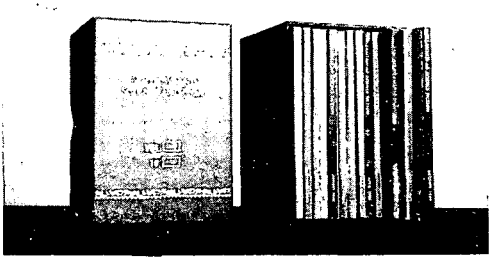
Then, on the lighter side of the news, 72-year-old Andrew Burns of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, won a national amateur bowling competition. Then twelve clowns collected money in an auditorium in New York City on behalf of mentally retarded children. Then several young women wore bathing suits decorated with large plastic discs. Then Boston defeated Philadelphia and Purdue murdered Indiana State.

The time was ten minutes after eight.

Soon it would be the next day. He was trapped in this sequence, and he could not awake.



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FILMS

Baird Searles

THE NEW YORK FILM FESTIVAL is not only an artistic event, but a trade fair, in a sense, where foreign films of esthetic merit are viewed and sometimes purchased by commercial distributors in the U.S. But the mere appearance of a film at the Festival does not assure its U.S. distribution, therefore Alain Resnais' **Je T'Aime, Je T'Aime** (I Love You, I Love You) may or may not be shown at your local art house in the future. But as the only entry this year that can be classified as sf, it merits review here, I think.

Unfortunately, we have here a cinematic equivalent of the classic literary case of the "main-stream" author using a science fiction device for his own ends and coming a cropper. The earlier films of Resnais, notably the highly acclaimed *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* and *Last Year at Marienbad,* demonstrated that the director liked to play around with time. This is a justified device dating as far back as the Hollywood flashback; why in this instance he felt he had to really use a time machine baffles me. It's this that makes the film sf; the hero, just recovering from a suicide attempt, agrees to be used as a subject in a research center experiment in time travel, and is supposed to be thrown back to the year before for exactly one minute. He is placed in a "machine" (which looks just like a large garlic bud. How French!) after preparation under drugs, does in fact go back for that minute (when he happened to be at the beach with his girl), but something goes awry and we view the last few years of his life in disjointed, nonsequential pieces. This may be a triumph of film editing, but it is a curiously uninteresting life, and a not very interesting film, so far as I'm concerned. This aside from the fact that it's certainly bad science fiction; characterized by the fact that his physical body keeps coming and going from the garlic bud, but only his consciousness makes the trip back in time. This is the kind of thing that gets sf types characterized as nit-pickers when they point out such inconsistencies, but to me it's as glaring a mistake as tire tracks in Ben Hur.

Shown along with it at the Festival was a delightful animated short, which as I remember was Czech. Its name and creator escape me, but it concerned a host of machines landing on and digging into an unspecified planet. The machines were drawn in that fine, steel etching maner that the Victorians used; the planet was all

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marbled papers and mottled textures, its inhabitants amoebic white blobs. The not unexpected ending was that the machines were microscopic invaders into a human anatomy, but visually the film was a beauty.

Things to come dept. . . . Remakes of a lot of classics coming up. A *Seven Footprints to Satan;* I recently saw a stunning still from the first production (early 30s, I think) which never seems to show anywhere. Another *I Am Legend* in the making with Charlton Heston, surprisingly soon after the first one, which was not half bad. For peripheral 19th century Gothic types (of which I am one), a new *Wuthering Heights* and a new *Jane Eyre,* the latter starring Susannah York and George C. Scott. The only new thing on the horizon is something I'm not sure we need . . . another Planet of the Apes film. Despite the fact that they blew the whole thing to smithereens at the end of *Beneath the* . . . here comes *Secret of the* . . . Duck, everybody!

Late, Late Show Thoughts . . . Recently saw *Stairway to Heaven* for the umpteenth time on the Tv. Sentimental, maybe, but its literacy and the beauty of its extraordinary special effects (especially the heavenly courtroom fading to spiral nebula) never cease to amaze me.

April is Anderson month

Our April issue will be the fifth in a series of special issues, each devoted to the work of a distinguished writer of science fiction and fantasy. The subject this time is **Poul Anderson.** Featured will be a brand-new, complete short novel by Mr. Anderson. It's called "The Queen of Air and Darkness." The issue will also include James Blish's critical essay on Poul Anderson's work, a personal profile by Gordon R. Dickson, and a bibliography. The cover is by Kelly Freas. The April issue is on sale February 4, but you can make sure that you receive a copy by sending us the coupon on page 58. All of these special issues have become collector's items, and all are out of print except for the most recent, devoted to Fritz Leiber (see page 118).

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We'd be guessing if we said that Mrs. Moore was perhaps bitten recently by a permissively raised child; in fact, we do not know what small trauma drove her to write this tale about What Happened at the Coltharp Free Children's Center. Whatever it was, we should be grateful, for she has conceived a minor masterpiece of mordant humor. Progressive preschool education will never be the same.

A DIFFERENT DRUMMER

by Raylyn Moore

My name is Ernestine Coltharp. I am a teacher. Please don't make the mistake of reading into this announcement some hint of apology or self-effacement, for I am not just any teacher but the director of The Coltharp Free Children's Center, of which you may have heard. Not only has it been an enviable financial success—the "free" refers of course not to tuition but to theory—but it has also over the years been the subject of any number of theses and published articles as well as the object of professional visitations by experts from all over the world. All this despite our purposely remote location deep in the motherlode country.

In one important way it is to my advantage to make this statement as brief as possible. However, boredom is also a factor in my present drastic predicament, and when discussing the Free Center I am never bored. I am therefore torn, yet see myself leaning in favor of a certain prolixity. It seems I simply cannot resist including a few details, especially since I may never (it has occurred to me gradually, as the hours pass and the full seriousness of my plight becomes apparent) have another opportunity to express myself. Details such as the secret of my success, for instance.

(It might be argued here by the superficially inclined that "suc-

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cess" has become for me an ironic term in light of what has happened. In the long view, however, I am completely vindicated; my methods of bringing children to their full potential have obviously scored beyond even my own most fanciful projections, as I shall presently show.)

My secret of success, then, has two parts: devotion, and a strong sense of continuity and eclecticism. The question for me is never whether an idea is old or new, but whether or not it works.

The earliest memories I have of myself focus on a jagged, dark-gray sheet of slate some three feet at its largest dimension, culled from the refuse bin of the elementary school where my father was janitor. I stood the slate on our back porch and seated my dolls in front of it, along with any younger or weaker children from the neighborhood whom I could impress into the role of pupils. Tirelessly I chalked letters and figures on the board while enunciating rules and fragments of knowledge. "Ernestine is a natural-born teacher," my parents said proudly. I never doubted it.

Later, faced with the conventional choice between career and a love affair or marriage, I hesitated not an instant. In truth my choice was the more clear-cut for my having long since discovered in my character a strong abhorrence for the notion of any other sentient being penetrating my body and attempting to inhabit it with me. Even temporarily, even momentarily. The prospect of male intrusion was horrendous enough; the idea of being host to an alien parasite in the form of a fetus over a long gestation period was absolutely gruesome. Refusing all proposals and propositions indiscriminately, I clove to my studies and the contemplation of my goal: launching a school of my own as soon as I had completed my master's.

Nor did I waste time worrying over my psyche. Never exactly unsophisticated, I was as an education major extremely well read in the sciences leading to self-knowledge and was thus aware that my case was not entirely exceptional among the human race. Also, doing my first practice teaching, I discovered quickly enough that my slight aberration did not extend to a distaste for little boys. On the contrary, I frankly preferred them to little girls.

So much for devotion (that is, until a later incident, with which I shall deal in due course). The eclecticism can be far more simply explained. With the single idea in mind that I wanted to take children into my sole care at two years or younger and turn them out at five absolutely free in mind and body, I carefully selected and adapted to my own purposes the very best insights of Anna Freud,

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Piaget, Dewey, the indomitable *dottoressa*, the Bank Streeters, A. S. Neill, and the rest of them. To this distillation I gradually added my own original observations and conclusions (later collected under the title, *The Coltharp Method Explained*, Middenstead University Press, 1951), which I shall not attempt to go into here except to say that gestalt therapy and transactional analysis have borrowed much from me, and not given me any credit either.

As for my Free Center, like many another worthwhile ambition it was almost stillborn for lack of early support. On emerging from my own schooling, I discovered that sound theories and academic clouds of glory were not enough. In order to found an institution, I had to have instant money in impossibly large amounts for rental of a plant, insurance, equipment, supplies, and so on.

Banks and loan companies were not noticeably eager to help even though I tried strenuously to put across to them the importance of my plans to the educational world. Personally I had neither money nor prospects. I had been a scholarship student all through college. My parents were by now both dead, and in any case had been very poor.

That left Professor Havelock von Glubok, my graduate school adviser, who according to campus rumor had accumulated a competent fortune in the old country by black-market manipulation during the war. As an adviser he had been extremely helpful, always sticking strictly to business during the earlier parts of our many interviews in his stuffy office. The last quarter hour, however, the professor unfailingly reserved for trying to get his hand under my skirt. He had never left off trying, and I had never left off trying to prevent him. At least not until that day I went to him with my financial troubles.

Rheumy eyes above his Franklin spectacles aglint with lust, he said glottally, "Bud, my child, do not speeg of *bor*rowinguh. I vill *giff* you all the money you vand if only—"

Once in Professor von Glubok's bed, I perceived that the impending experience would be even more ghastly than anything I had undergone in fancy. I gritted my teeth and squeezed my eyes shut and at the crunch could not avoid shrieking out, "Don't, don't, Doctor von Glubok!"

"Gall me 'daddy'," he panted, his oily beard thrust painfully against my cringing chest. "Zay, 'Don't, don't, *Dad*dy!' "

Instantly I jerked out of his repulsive clutch and sat up in the welter of sweaty bed linen. "You are profoundly inhibited by an incest fixation, Doctor," I warned gravely. "You should get help."

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In answer he belted me across the mouth.

But enough. I include mention of this depressing scene only to show the full extent of my dedication to my cause.

With von Glubok's backing I bought twenty secluded mountainous acres, had the property securely enclosed in ten-foot unclimbable steel-mesh fences to keep meddling civilization at a distance, and built a magnificent schoolhouse designed down to the last detail by myself. The next year I added a dormitory with all furnishings, like those in the school, made to the scale of young children, and separate living quarters with locks on the doors for the director. (Though these separate quarters slightly compromised my ideal of complete freedom of access between director and students at all times, I found I needed privacy after all, especially during the weekend visits of the professor.)

I was paying a high price to start at the top, but my maturity and natural sense of measure saved me from emotional breakdown. And while I never totally adjusted to my former adviser's loathsome attentions, neither did the relationship affect my essential normality. I still preferred little boys to little girls.

Admittedly it may have been only the fact of Kyle's being a little boy which predisposed me to like him on sight that fateful morning this past summer when I hurried down to the main gate in response to the buzzer and found him standing there alone, his parents, or whoever had delivered him, having already departed.

This fact in itself did not surprise me. The matter of a child's having been "dumped" on me like a foundling, that is. The theory of the Free Center, as I may already have implied, rests on the premise that the entire upbringing of the applicant be left entirely to me. The students remain on the premises for three hundred and sixty-five days a year, holidays not excepted. (Every day is a holiday to the children at the Center.) You would be surprised (or maybe if you are a harassed parent yourself you would not) how many concerned and enlightened people are more than willing to turn over their young to me for a matter of three or four formative years.

But to explain specifically about Kyle, some time ago the Center found itself in a financial position to offer a handful of "scholarships" for use by children from economically depressed situations. Kyle was a scholarship child sent to me from the Love and Peace Society, a commune far back in the wilderness of eastern Oregon, technically eligible because the society has no money; its economy requires none.

My heart had leaped when I

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discovered Kyle's application in the mail. For like the morticians who see the optimum moment for injecting embalming fluid as "just before actual death sets in," we experimental teachers of the very young would, if we could, claim suzerainty at the instant of conception. (Ah, or even the instant before?) The first few years of life spent in the pure, noncompetitive atmosphere of a group of the stature of the Love and Peace Society seemed to me the next best thing. Not that any outsider really knows what goes on in those communities so long and so cleanly detached from the rest of the world. We can assume, however, from available data however slight, that they enjoy standards exceedingly like my own. Personal freedom within an absolute, naturally evolved democracy.

All this background exposition, however, conveys nothing whatever of Kyle's and my first confrontation on the dusty road. We looked each other over in silence, except for a quiet twittering of insects in the roadside weeds and a soft soughing from the nearby pine tops. My impressions were of a slender yet sturdy body, blond hair, features already partially formed at four years (I had his age from the application) into firm brow, straight nose, chin advancing to a slight underbite. Thin brown legs emerged gracefully from clumsily fashioned lederhosen—all clothing in those communes is handmade, much of it from deerskin or rough homespun—and the large eyes were a level crayon-blue.

Yet even words of description fail in the face of the blinding instant when our glances locked and I knew sudden love, challenge, joyful suspense. For another part of my brain was already ticking off a valid professional, if intuitive, judgment. This Kyle was a *leader*. The happy fact stood out as clearly as if he'd worn a sign. *Was* there also, in that same split-stroke of time, some augury, some fleet vibration too subtle to be apprehended and even by my own sharply attuned and experienced senses?

But again enough. I must yet learn to ration my words, discipline myself to temper the intense happiness of the recent past to the somberness of the present.

In that first meeting, when we finally began to exchange remarks, Kyle seemed instantly responsive. Hands trembling like those of a virgin in the presence of the man she knows will deflower her (and you will excuse the analogy on grounds of what eventually happened), I relocked the heavy gate and on the way up the hill to the compound of buildings elicited easily from Kyle the information that his application had shown no surname because he had none, that within the Love and Peace

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Society all adults were considered parents to all children. Kyle even indicated, without the slightest hesitation or show of anxiety, that he had never known exactly who his biological father and mother were, a very advanced concept in itself for a four-year-old.

Group interaction of all sorts excites me; after all, it is a large part of my lifework. Hearing these things about the commune, combined with being so near to Kyle, induced a kind of ecstasy. By the time we had reached the dormitory, where I assigned a space to our new arrival, I had a number of times already caressed him. He seemed neither to welcome nor reject these advances. I, in turn, saw in his seeming indifference evidence of superb adjustment; those children who apparently need no attention from adults are not necessarily unaffectionate themselves, but are simply so accustomed to signs of approval that they take them as their due. My assumption on this score seemed further confirmed when within the first twenty-four hours Kyle had completely come to terms with his new environment. He settled in without a ripple, included and accepted by the group with none of the usual painful preliminaries.

At the time— it was August— the children were harvesting the muscats. But again I see a digression is unavoidable, for clarity's sake and despite the alarming build-up of wordage I may soon regret.

You will notice that nowhere in this account have I mentioned assistants or other adult teachers at the Free Center. This is because there are none. One of the most radically innovative tenets of the Coltharp Method is a rejection of the canard that it is of some advantage to have preschool-aged children supervised by one adult per ten or twelve pupils. Nonsense, I say. Such heavy overseeing is only a weak admission of incompetence on the part of a teacher. Our quota at the Center is sixty children and we are always filled, with a long waiting list. I alone serve as their adult guide, making use of common sense.

Really contented children help one another, and share willingly in work they themselves see as necessary. It requires a four-year-old intelligence to wash dishes, a three-year-old intelligence to sweep a floor. The only reason children don't usually take the initiative in such chores is that they are not properly motivated in a cooperative setting.

Of course everything must be kept very basic. No frills like plush carpets or decorative breakables. Wholesome, uncomplicated meals of raw vegetables and fruits are prepared by the children themselves. We even raise our own produce, with the students

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planting seeds and hoeing out weeds, and later reaping legumes, greens, roots, and sprouts in abundance. We keep several goats and a few laying hens, but raise no meat. The more reliable nutritionists have long assured us children require no animal protein except that in milk and eggs, that one of the worst disasters of this century has been the fraud of the high-protein diet. Too much meat causes, rather than prevents, disease.

However, suffice it here to say we are vegetarians, and almost self-sufficient on our twenty acres. The only food products we require to be shipped to the Free Center are graham crackers and bottled juice, and since I order these only once in eighteen or so months, filling the storeroom each time, some of the children even believe there is a work detail somewhere baking the crackers. (This question has come up a few times at our group-encounter sessions, which are meetings of the full enrollment for the purpose of answering bull session-type questions, and working out problems before they can arise.)

But back now to Kyle and the muscats. I noticed immediately that our new student, predictably, had already, on his first full day in residence and while working with children as much as a year older than himself, taken over as foreman of one of the picking details. Moreover, he had instituted a more efficient system of putting the grapes directly from the vines into the crates as the children came to the ends of the rows, thus saving both time and the extra handling involved when the fruit had to be removed from the picking baskets.

I made no comment of course. To interfere in any interaction within the group is unthinkable unless real strife is apparent. But neither could I take my eyes from Kyle. My musings, I discovered, had an even more violent quality than on the previous day. Did Kyle love me? Had he ever loved any woman before? One of his surrogate mothers in the commune, perhaps? Inevitably, I had been the object on numerous other occasions of the perfect, pure love of little boys, a love uncomplicated by ugly lust, unsullied by the prospect of venery. Coming from Kyle, if I were so fortunate, I could visualize such a love as the apogee of my career, my *raison d'être.* Would I even be able to let him go from the Center once he reached the age of five?

Dazzled by these ruminations, I had involuntarily wandered very near the arbor where Kyle was at work. Which is how I happened to overhear the word he uttered after idly putting a handful of overripe grapes into his mouth and then suddenly, after making a wry face, spitting them out.

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In spite of myself, I experienced real shock at his language. If he had used some other word, *any* other, I would have kept silence, for freedom of expression among my pupils is taken for granted. On the other hand, this particular word had never been spoken at the Free Center. Most of the children didn't even know its meaning. I could not allow even my beloved Kyle to undermine our standards.

"Kyle?" I said, "what did I just hear you say? Would you repeat it please?" Yes, it was in the nature of a reprimand, and in front of his peer group. But I was acting on behalf of the greater good.

He answered agreeably enough. "Certainly, Ernestine. I said, 'These grapes are bad'."

"Spoiled," I corrected gently. "You meant, 'These grapes are spoiled.' Or overripe, or rotten, if you like. Wherever did you hear that word 'bad'?"

The blue eyes and full mouth smiled easily, almost mockingly. "Maybe I read it in a book."

"Oh?" I said. "Do you read then?"

"Why would I say I did if it weren't so?" he replied logically.

Had I not been already hopelessly enamored, I would have succumbed at that moment. His maturity was enchanting. He spoke exactly like an adult, yet there he stood in that delicious, diminutive, half-formed body of a little boy.

Now, since I suppose I must say this somewhere, perhaps here is as relevant (or irrelevant) a place as any. As can be seen, I was captivated from the start. My thralldom lasted over a period of two full months. This is the only explanation I can offer as to why the question which should have presented itself immediately simply never occurred to me at all: how was it that the Love and Peace Society, in its fifteen or so years of existence, was only now, for the first time, sending out one of its children for instruction at preschool level?

How indeed.

The temptation at this juncture too, after so much verbiage, seems to be to rush headlong, answering this question and all others, while at the same time sliding over my own many failures of intuition. Nevertheless, a full beginning demands a full ending. So I am obliged instead to proceed step by disheartening step with what happened at the Free Center from the day of the muscats onward, providing this narrative with a filling-in and a rounding-out, even at my own great expense.

But make no mistake; for me the two months were very heaven. (I note here that I seem inclined now and then to Wordsworthian turns of phrase, while Swinburnian would be more apropos, as you will see. Still, who can quibble with the expressions of

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the unconscious?) For one thing, my daydreams were very soon the most *exalté* I'd ever known, consisting of giddy projections into a future in which Kyle would pass the Harvard entrance exams directly from Coltharp, thus achieving a coup unique in the annals of education. Accompanying him east would be—who else? A new kind of crowning for my lifework which seemed increasingly less like a daydream than a plum within easy reach. We would take an apartment together just off campus; I would exclude all newsmen, charlatans, and curiosity-seekers, giving Kyle hours of uninterrupted study time. Our leisure time, however, would be our own.

Meanwhile, what was going on right under my nose at the Free Center was enough in itself to maintain my ecstatic state. For one of my other dreams was already in fruition. In explanation to those who have not read my book, some years ago a D. Ed. dissertation concerned a project conducted at XYZ School in which two score children, left entirely to their own devices without even a hint of authoritarian regulation from above, drifted naturally into a system of government in which every child had an equal voice in decisions, work was equally divided, and the benignant majority saw to it that the minority were not discriminated against. I myself during my early years of work with children had refined this phenomenon to the nth power, and a vastly improved version of the experiment eventually became part of the Coltharp Method.

On no occasion, however, had I seen the emerging child-society so beautifully operating as it did at the Center after Kyle arrived.

It is my policy, when such projects are running well, not to disturb the mixture, so to speak, by stirring the pot. We all know what happens to the primitive society as soon as the anthropologist appears in its midst, notebook and pen in hand. My custom is therefore to withdraw to my own apartment for an indeterminate period when one of these governments by the children is being set up or is undergoing changes in leadership. However, I always make it clear I am available for consultation if needed. Oddly, however, during this time no child called on me for anything at all.

Here again one may discern the true depth of my temporary madness. For even in the best run child-development centers hardly half an hour can pass without at least one small participant bursting into tears, gagging on a mouthful of finger paint, stuffing play dough up his nose, or having a bathroom accident. Interpersonal conflicts calling for adult intervention also are common. "Come quick. Danny is urinating all over

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Sally again," is a rallying cry which will be recognized instantly by preschool teachers everywhere.

However, watching from behind a partially drawn shade over my office window, taking my notes on a pad concealed in my lap, I observed the group's behavior carefully on the day following the grape harvest and detected no discord. Most of the sixty children first encircled Kyle, sitting down docilely and making Indian legs while he spoke to them at length. Afterward, the large group divided into work details and trudged off in all directions to take care of the routine chores. It was a creditable beginning, I thought. True, I had not seen any voting going on. Kyle had seemed to appoint the work details arbitrarily, though I may have been wrong, I told myself, since I could not hear their actual words.

On the following days the children seemed so self-contained that I even left off watching and began to catch up on the paper work in my office. Once I heard rhythmic sounds and went to the window to discover a marching band, of all things, had been organized. It seemed at once too sophisticated and too conventional. I had never encouraged military play of any kind. Still, it was hardly such a departure that I felt I should interpose what might conceivably be my own prejudices.

I shall forego the opportunity for more detail here. Anyone further interested in the day-to-day account of this period at the Free Center may eventually be able to read my notes which, scanty as they were on account of my preoccupation, still exist. Probably. At least I have no evidence they have been destroyed.

Having spoken of my great pleasure in the (at least outward) events of the two months, I must add this was not alone because of my relief at having the direction of the Center virtually lifted from my shoulders. No, it was the night visits from Kyle which caused my cup to overflow. Each evening, after the other students had retired—on stricter curfew under Kyle's leadership than any the group had ever set for themselves previously—he would present himself at my apartment.

There was never any formal discussion about these visits. He appeared as a matter of course, beginning the second night of his residency, and naturally I never discouraged him. I would serve mint tea as we sat together in the library reading. Afterward we would have long discussions. Among other things, these talks made me realize how much I had missed adult company—have I said anywhere that Professor von Glubok, who had become essentially my last link with the grown-up world, though a weak enough one, had died a year or so before

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this?—for Kyle did prove able to offer mature companionship in every important way, just as I had anticipated.

Reading extremely rapidly, he devoured great piles of my books, showing special interest in a collection, kept as a curiosity, of the work of the most antediluvian educators and theorists, both living and dead. "Who is William H. McGuffey?" he might ask. Or, "What about Dr. Max Rafferty?" Then a long, felicitous conversation would ensue. We talked into the night of Mr. Shaw and Bowes School, of flogging at Eton, the McMillan sisters, private governesses and tutors, the blab schools of pioneer times, rote learning, and corporal punishment.

Kyle was particularly enthusiastic over all the various imaginative forms the latter has taken through the history of education, from "sitting on air" in the classrooms of yesteryear, to the force-feeding of vomitus, said to have been in use as a punishment in a private school in California as recently as this decade. In lovingly recounting for Kyle's edification all the outrages teachers have perpetrated on defenseless children since the beginning of records on such things, I spoke so feelingly and articulately on one occasion that I was immensely sorry not to have thought at the time of turning on my tape recorder, as the material would have done excellently for delivery at an NEA convention sometime.

On several other evenings I also tried, though perhaps not wholeheartedly enough, to divert my visitor's attention to something lighter and more in keeping with his real status as a child. I recall recommending, among other things, Lewis Carroll, who, as you may imagine, occupies a warm spot in my own affections, the good reverend's kinkiness for little girls being a condition I am singularly well equipped to understand. Kyle was not the least interested in Alice's tribulations, however.

Sometimes our sessions lasted until midnight, but never beyond. Though I would not under any circumstances have asked Kyle to leave, he was himself very sensible about getting enough sleep against the demands of the coming day. He did not discuss any of the problems he must surely have been meeting during his running of the children's government, and true to my own ideals I did not venture any suggestion, or even bring up the matter.

After Kyle had left for the night, I usually made the rounds of the compound, seeing what maintenance needed doing, what supplies needed restocking. There was surprisingly little action for me to take, even in these small affairs, so efficient were Kyle's work details. It was on one of

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these night trips, however, that I discovered the thing that had happened in the dollroom.

Here another word of necessary explanation, though this story is by now growing so unwieldy that the very contemplation of the stacked sheets is a physical agony. I do not exaggerate when I say the manuscript already appears to be over a foot thick!

The dollroom, a popular place for unstructured play, is supplied with a number of extremely life-like dolls arranged in sets of families. In addition to real hair and the skin-like plastic with which they are covered, they have delightfully genuine-looking genitalia. The children endlessly dress and undress these dolls and move them in and out of the split-level, suburban-type dollhouses with two cars and a camper in each garage and a TV aerial on every roof. The nearest things we have to toy weapons at the Free Center are also in this room, a few wooden mallets to be used by the children, if they feel so disposed, on the parent and sibling dolls, which are of necessity practically indestructible.

Imagine my surprise, then, on the evening I walked into the dollroom and found one of the mommie dolls had been destroyed by a knife, or knife-like implement. That is, both breasts had been amputated, and the pudenda mutilated by hacking. A quick search of the room disclosed the telltale instrument jammed into a dollhouse chimney. It was an ordinary table knife from the dining hall, but I could tell from the signs of scarification along its edge that the knife had been honed, and fairly expertly. That presupposed slyness and substantial premeditation on the part of the child involved. Such an incident had never occurred before at the Free Center.

At first I had misgivings, but quickly enough told myself how foolish and unprofessional that attitude was. Just because up to now no child had shown sufficient inventiveness to plan and perform such an act did not mean the act was in itself inappropriate, I reasoned. After all, that was the function of the dolls, to serve as aids in working out hostilities. Some child—and I would never know who, nor would I inquire—had successfully enacted a psychodrama in the dollroom and was no doubt at this very minute sleeping the more restfully for the catharsis he or she had experienced. I decided to think no more about it.

It was the following night that Kyle arrived at my door for his visit looking extremely tired. I said nothing but thought privately, with considerable concern, that he might be falling ill, even though children's ailments are one thing we are spared at the Center because of our organically grown,

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vegetable diet, as I have already explained.

My visitor offered to pour out our tea, which I had ready, and I was charmed anew at this show of graciousness, since he had taken no initiative about the tea before this.

A brief silence passed, during which Kyle finished with the tea and took down the volume of Nietzsche he had been affecting to read for the past few evenings. At least I was fairly certain this latest reading performance was affectation. No one was more impressed with Kyle's vastly accelerated learning ability than I, but I felt somehow his sudden interest in archaic philosophy was a posture, perhaps a lover's ploy to impress me or, knowing Kyle, to tease. (Alas, I still thought in these terms.) So I decided on the instant to chide him, if only to see what would develop.

I took a bracing draught of tea and said, "Oh, Kyle, surely you're not really going to go on with that impossible stuff again tonight?"

He looked at me thoughtfully above the book. "Oh? And what should I read, Ernestine?" Carelessly he closed the Nietszche and tossed it with a plop onto the floor. He stood with grimy shoes on my sofa to flip down one of the old readers which had so occupied him some weeks earlier. A valuable second-edition Ray's Arithmetic was loosened from the row and crashed to the floor also, taking Kyle's untouched cup of tea with it. I winced but again held my tongue.

Kyle ignored the accident and opened the reader at random. "Is this so much better then? 'The oldest was a bad boy, always in trouble himself and trying to get others into trouble'." He leafed over a page and read, " 'George had a whipping for his folly, as he ought to have had'."

I presumed this was my guest's way of making an overture to one of our dialogues on the evolution of education methods, but no sooner had I begun my careful response than, to my immense joy, I discovered he had leaned his head back against the sofa and immediately fallen asleep.

Though I had prayed for this to happen on Kyle's prior visits, he had never before allowed himself to drowse in my presence. I waited for the slumber to deepen, as it does with young children very quickly, usually in no more than ten minutes. Trembling with anticipation, I laid hasty plans. I would lift him into my bed in the next room, loosen and remove his clothing, and then get in beside him. It would be easily the most thrilling night of my life, a new pinnacle in nonverbal encounter. I had certainly through the years lain down at various times in the cots of little boys in the dormitory, rocked them to sleep, soothed

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away anxiety, and so on. But this was something else again. I had never had a little boy in my own bed before, nor had I ever felt about any little boy as intensively as I felt about Kyle.

Lovingly I moved him. Tentatively at first. Then I supported his full weight, which is not inconsiderable; he is solid and well muscled. I can only plead that I was out of my mind from the moment I touched his flesh. Perhaps if I hadn't so foolishly left the lamp burning on the dresser? But then an important part of my hoped-for experience was to be the visual element. I wanted to see as well as touch.

Unfortunately he woke prematurely, actually after only about fifteen minutes in bed. He didn't seem surprised to be where he was, only faintly amused. "Well, Ernestine, what now?"

"Do you think, dear," I said, trying to keep my voice from quavering, "that you might be able to bring yourself to call me 'mommie'?"

"What?"

"Only if you *want* to, that is," I choked out. "It would mean a lot to me."

But his attention was now distracted. "Hey, what are *those,* Ernestine?"

Moments before I had impulsively ripped off my dressing gown and was in a state of semi-nakedness. Nearly hysterical with delight at his interest, I was about to explain the function of my breasts when I noted that the crayon-blue gaze was overshooting my body to fasten instead on the far wall of the bedroom. Hanging on that wall was a large assortment of whips, the property of my one-time adviser and late business partner, whose personality disorder had gone far deeper than I suspected when I made my too-hasty analysis during our first roll in the bushes.

There were blacksnakes, cat-o-nine-tails, coach whips, riding crops, flexible-steel lashes, even electric cattle prods and a few branding irons. Having no interest in these implements myself after the passing of my benefactor, I had left them where they were, procrastinating about the day I would get around to packing them away—there had seemed to be no rush, since no one else had visited my bedroom before except von Glubok himself—until the whips had for me taken on the invisibility of the purloined letter.

Now, however, I was terribly chagrined. "Oh, those," I said, striving for a bantering tone but not fooling Kyle, I'm afraid. "Just some souvenirs that once belonged to an old acquaintance of mine."

Slowly Kyle produced his now-familiar smile of worldly comprehension. It had an effect of dissolving even the shattered remnants of my recent joy.

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The denouement you must by now have guessed, even though I myself was still unable to predict it at this time. The next morning—or was it two mornings later?—I woke late to the ringing of the telephone at my bedside. It rang once only. Wrong number, I thought sleepily, but I picked it up anyway, fighting off a lethargy which suggested the aftereffects of a strong dose of soporific, though I had taken no pills before retiring. Curiously, the extension in my office had evidently already been picked up and a conversation was going on. Someone speaking in a long-distance voice inquired for me, and the voice next door in my office assured the caller, "Ernestine Coltharp? Yes, this is she."

And it was. The voice was my own, sounding exactly as I do, or as only someone could sound who had over a long period carefully studied and memorized my speech patterns and tonal range. The conversation went on for some minutes, the caller inquiring if an appointment could be made for a group of student teachers to tour the Center, and my voice saying no, it would not be possible, that I was conducting an intricate, long-term experiment in interpersonal relations among very young children and it would preclude all visitations for a period of at least ten months.

I was tempted at several points to interrupt this insane exchange and expose the hoax. Yet my curiosity over what would be said next—more, my admiration for such a work of art as that impersonation—overrode completely my sense of outrage. For I knew who the impersonator must be. Having taken over the children, Kyle must have found it a natural step to enter my office and take it over as well.

As the conversation ended and we all hung up, my eye fell on the far wall of the bedroom where the whips had hung. They were gone.

For lack of space—oh, for a journalist's skill at cutting a whole lifetime down to one narrow paragraph of obituary—I pass over the shock of actually seeing Kyle at my desk, jaw more articulated than ever, blue eyes chill and glittering now, the eyes of a Franco, a Castro, a Che.

The elite corps (I can think of no more accurate term), armed with the whips and honed table silver, arrested me forthwith as a political enemy.

My trial was commendably swift. Kyle was judge and jury. I have been confined ever since in the only other place in the compound with a lock on the door, and that put on by the contractor by mistake: the storeroom. And of course this lock is on the outside.

I shall not starve, nor die of thirst. At least not soon. Before my interest flagged I counted five hundred crates of graham crackers

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and three hundred cartons of bottled juice.

The court (Kyle) decreed that I was to be taken to the potty three times a day by a whip-and-knife guard and to the shower three times a week. Needless to say, the decree has not been carried out; children are ever forgetful about such matters. However, there happens to be a janitor's closet in the storeroom with running water and a floor-level sink in which to wring out mops. I keep clean as best I can using this facility.

I cannot help worrying from time to time about the effect of the new regime on the children as well as on myself. For I know now how the weepers are controlled, and the spillers at table, and the paint eaters, nose stuffers, and troublemakers of all kinds. Flogging is no doubt one of the milder punishments. I could say, truthfully, that the children are themselves to blame for accepting Kyle so readily, but such criticism applies a thousandfold to myself.

Perhaps I have failed to say that at the encounter sessions where problems are discussed I have often encouraged the children to compose, orally, their life-stories, telling everything they can remember about themselves, using as much free association as they like. And I suppose this custom helped inspire my own sentence, which is a relatively light one. Unless it is changed. (Children are in the end capricious. Who can trust them? I do not for one moment forget what happened to the mommie doll.)

I would have preferred, even welcomed, a sentence calling for flagellation by our Leader. He must apprehend that I yearn even now for some contact with him, however punitive, and purposely stays away. So do they all. I have been alone in this musty, windowless storeroom for seventy-two hours now, which already seem like seventy-two years.

Kyle can no doubt keep stalling people off by telephone indefinitely. How many months before somebody's parents decide finally to storm the barricades and come looking for their little darling? The Love and Peace Society, which, as I think now, expelled Kyle as an incorrigible, a threat to its way of life, can scarcely be expected to come looking for *him*.

But my sentence: I am to write my life-story, in perfect penmanship, using a supply of black crayons and heavy art paper, five thousand times.

At least it is my good fortune never in all these years to have lost my taste for graham crackers.

My name is Ernestine Coltharp. I am a teacher. Please don't make the mistake of reading into this announcement some hint of apology or self-effacement, for I am not just any teacher but . . .

UNAUTHORIZED DUPLICATION
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Novelist-screenwriter Ray Russell (his most recent book was a novel about Hollywood, THE COLONY*) is an occasional contributor to science fiction magazines. Most of his sf appears in* Playboy*, with which he has been associated since 1954. This, his third story for F&SF ("Incommunicado," November 1957; "The Rosebud," August 1959), concerns the extravagant and not altogether serious adventures of Gordon W. Popowcer.*

THE FORTUNES OF POPOWCER

by Ray Russell

Chapter One: *The Mom Bomb*

SECURITY CLEARANCE TOOK just thirty-eight seconds to computer-check my fingerprints, voiceprint, and brainprint. Actually, it's that last one, the EEG, that counts. Those others are nothing more than double-checks, archaic, easily faked these days. But the brainprint is tamper-proof. So far, at least. And it guaranteed me to be 100% Gordon W. Popowcer, the genuine article, not a Xerox.

So the magnetic door zanged open and I trotted through. Quick. Before it could zang shut again and chop me in two. I don't trust magnetic doors. Does anyone?

"Mr. Popowcer?" asked a terrific redhead in colonel's gear. "Silly question. Of course you're Mr. Popowcer."

"If I'm not," I replied, "the taxpayers have been snookered out of

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a million bucks worth of useless security gadgets."

"Two million five," she said, "and some odd change. Welcome. It's an honor to meet you."

"I gather *I'm* the one who's supposed to feel honored. The first civilian ever permitted within these hallowed halls."

"That's right. Except the President, of course."

"I don't consider the Commander-in-Chief a civilian. He's brass in a pin-stripe suit."

She laughed. "That remark *may* pull down your security rating a notch or two."

"We're being bugged?"

"But of course. Won't you sit down? I'm Colonel Stockton, but you don't have to call me sir."

I sat. "Does the Colonel have a first name?"

"Elinor."

"Gordon."

"Good. Let's begin." She hit a button on her desk and the wall lit up with a full-color picture of the gas works, or an atomic energy plant, or some other gigantic hunk of machinery.

"This is Mom," she said.

"I'd rather meet her in person."

"No way," she said with a brisk headshake. "Not even *your* security clearance is *that* good. And it's not necessary that you see the actual thing."

"I'll be the judge of that, Colonel. Remember, I'm a civilian. You have no authority over me. I'm here because the government met my fee. A five-figure fee. Which I am willing to blow, dear, by getting up and leaving now."

"Negative, Gordon!" she snapped, and as I started to lift my butt from the chair, a jolt of electricity knocked me right back down again.

"*What the hell—*"

"Nobody," she said, "but *nobody* walks out on a project as top secret as this one. You already know far too much about Mom."

"I don't know a damn thing!"

"You know it exists. That in itself is rigidly classified information."

"*What* do I know exists? All I know is that we're sitting here in an air-conditioned tomb half a mile under Death Valley, looking at a picture of a pile of hardware called Mom. I don't know what it is, what it does, or even if it really exists."

She relaxed a little. "If you'll give me a chance, I'll explain."

"Promise to behave?"

"Sure. I'll behave." She moved her hand away from the button, and I shot out of the chair and fed her two mean slaps across the face. "I'll behave like *this*. And *this*!"

Then I turned around and kicked my chair loose from its wiring so I could sit down without fear of being zapped again.

I smiled. "You were saying, Elinor?"

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She rubbed her face. "You're a bastard, Popowcer."

"Gordon, please. And you're right. I'm a bastard. Now do you want to tell me about Mom?"

She turned to the picture wall. "Sometimes it's called the Mom Bomb, but it's not really a bomb. It doesn't explode. In fact, its purpose is to prevent a specific type of explosion."

"What type?"

"The Population Explosion," she said. "Mom stands for Maternity Obstruction Mechanism."

"Awfully big for a contraceptive," I said. "The Pill is much more compact. Even the old-fashioned devices—"

"The Pill doesn't work. You know that. Not enough people use it. Same is true of the old-fashioned devices."

"How does Mom work?"

"I'm not a scientist," she said. "Tell me in little words."

"Mom transmits an impulse of some kind—don't ask me what kind because I don't know— using a secret wavelength. This impulse affects both male sperm and female ova in the human animal . . ."

"Mom makes them sterile?"

"As long as the impulse is transmitted, yes. When it's turned off, the spermatozoa and ova begin functioning normally again."

I sat back in my de-activated chair. "The range," I said. "Tell me about that. How far is it effective? How big an area can it cover?"

"That information is dispensed strictly on a need-to-know basis," she said, "and only ten people including the President need to know it."

"Eleven," I said. "Gordon W. Popowcer needs to know it, or he doesn't play ball."

She sighed. She looked away from me. And then she looked back. Straight into my eyes. "The world, Gordon," she said. "The whole wide world."

Beautiful, if it really worked. "But why am I here, Elinor?" I asked. "What's the problem, and how can I help solve it?—assuming I *want* to help solve it, after I hear what it is."

"You'll hear what it is, but not from me."

She poked a few more buttons, and the wall shredded itself into a split-screen effect showing close-ups of three tough customers—an ice-eyed Anglo, a broad-faced Slav, and a Fu Manchu type. Elinor tersely introduced them as John Corrigan of our State Department, Nikolai Borisov of the Soviet Union, and Lao Zi-Lei of Peking. Smile, I told myself, you're on Candid Camera.

Corrigan spoke first: "Mr. Popowcer, the birth control project known as Mom can save the world. But it can also be a terrible weapon. If only one nation possessed it, it could be used to thin

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the populations of all other countries to near extinction, while the population of its source nation remained stable or even grew. It can be used selectively, you see."

I nodded.

Borisov picked up the thread: "That, sir, is why your United States of America is not the only nation to possess such a device. My own country has an almost identical one, and so has the country of my Chinese colleague."

Lao merely nodded in curt confirmation.

"All three of these devices are currently in operation," Corrigan told me, "each one covering an effective area of one third of the earth's surface, therefore blanketing the world. They have been in operation for eight months."

"Which means," I said, "that in one month, the first results will be seen—no births anywhere in the world."

"Correct," said Corrigan.

"And this condition will continue," I asked, "until the Moms are turned off?"

Corrigan nodded.

"Well, gentlemen," I said, "I'm afraid I don't see the problem."

Lao Zi-Lei spoke for the first time. His voice had a sinister Asian sibilance. "The problem, Mr. Popowcer, is that *we cannot turn them off*."

THE RETURN OF POPOWCER

Chapter One: *Dial Nine Three Seven*

"YES," HE SAID, AND DIED.

That single word, or sound, that hiss of breath, and he was suddenly the deadest thing I've ever seen. Stunned, I let go of the withered corpse. It collapsed backward onto the leather couch.

I stood for a moment, looking at him, swallowing lumps, my heart beating, my eyes glancing quickly but meaninglessly around my office.

I looked at my watch. Dick was late; he should have been here twenty minutes before. Maybe he would know this dead old man. I certainly didn't. I had never set eyes on him before. For a moment, I debated with myself about waiting for Dick before doing anything.

But I decided against it. I walked over to my desk and dialed the police. My hand was shaking; my voice was not steady. "My name is Gordon W. Popowcer. Someone's just died here, I think you should come right over. Suite 804, the Stanton Building." I gave our address.

Then I just sat. I thought of trying to call Dick, but he'd be en

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route by now. Maybe not. Worth a try. I dialed his number: no answer.

That cadaver was the oldest, most ruined piece of humanity I'd ever seen—even in the brief moments I had seen him alive. Now, in the handful of minutes after his death, he seemed to have grown even older, more desiccated, caved in. This, I told myself, was an illusion, but, God, he had lived a long time—at least ninety years.

Why, though, had he chosen my office to die in? Why had he stumbled in, suddenly, unannounced, with such urgency, after closing hours, at nine in the evening?

Come to think of it, how had he gotten into the building?

On second thought, there was nothing in that. All tenants had keys, and I certainly didn't know every tenant in the building. He had a heart attack, stumbled into the wrong office—they all look alike—and died in my arms.

But why "Yes"?

Why not "Help," or "Please," or "Doctor," or "God," or nothing at all?

A sharp knock on the door jolted me from my thoughts. "Come in." Two cops in plain clothes entered.

"Mr. Popowcer?"

"Yes. I phoned."

"I'm Lieutenant Moss; this is Sergeant Duffy. May we see the body?"

"There he is."

They examined him briefly, searched his pockets, looked through his wallet, then pulled up chairs and sat down. "Would you just tell us how he died, Mr. Popowcer?"

I told them. It didn't take very long.

"And all he said was 'Yes'?"

"That's all. I'm not even sure it *was* 'Yes'—but it sounded like it."

"Why should he say that, Mr. Popowcer?"

"How should I know?"

"Does that word have some special meaning for you; is it a signal of some kind, a code?"

"No! Look, I never saw the man before! I don't know who the hell he is!"

Lieutenant Moss sighed. "I see. Mr. Popowcer, you have a partner, is that right?"

"Dick Rufus, yes."

"Where is Mr. Rufus now?"

"I wish I knew. He was supposed to be here almost an hour ago."

"Is Mr. Rufus usually late like this?"

"No, he's actually very punctual."

"Would you describe him?"

"Dick's a man of medium height, I guess you'd say, a few inches shorter than I am; well built, dark hair, curly; sort of no-color eyes, blue-green-gray-something."

"How old?"

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"Dick's about my age—thirty-five or six."

"Now, try to remember, Mr. Popowcer. This old man here on the couch. Maybe you *did* know him? I mean, maybe he's someone you may have met a few years ago, something like that? Maybe he's somebody's father—Mr. Rufus', for example—"

"Dick's father is dead, been dead for years."

"Can't you remember *ever* meeting this man before?"

"No."

"A friend of Mr. Rufus?"

"He might be a friend of Dick's, of course, but I do *not* know who he is."

"Does Mr. Rufus have any enemies that you know of?"

"No . . . why all this emphasis on Dick Rufus?"

Moss sighed again. He seemed very tired. "Well, Mr. Popowcer, Mr. Rufus is an hour late, you said. And he's a punctual man, you said . . ."

"Yes, but there's nothing ominous in that. I mean, I'm not *worried*. He'll show up."

"I hope so. Because the other thing, see, is that this dead old gentleman's driver's license, Social Security card, all his credit cards . . . *they all belong to Mr. Richard Rufus.*"

Later it was confirmed by the dead man's fingerprints. He was Dick Rufus, and no mistake, all ninety-odd years of him.

But it wasn't until the next morning that I found a scrawl in Dick's handwriting on his desk calendar: *Dial 937*. A number that short meant it was right here in the building. I involuntarily glanced at the phone, looked close at the dial, and realized, with an unpleasant flash of fear, that the letters corresponding to the numerals 937 were WXY, DEF, and PRS. In other words, there was another way of dialing 937.

Just dial YES.

Which I did. It rang only once, and then I heard a woman's voice say, "Good morning, Mr. Popowcer. We've been expecting your call."

THE SECRETS OF POPOWCER

Chapter One:

The Hunchback of the Opera

"DON'T YOU MEAN THE HUNCHback of Notre Dame?" I said. "Or the *Phantom* of the Opera?"

"No, Mr. Popowcer, I mean the Hunchback of the Opera," said Marco del Medico, repeating the

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phrase he had uttered a moment before. He was quite emphatic, his eyes bright as a bird's, his bald head gleaming as he nodded with sharp, abrupt movements.

I had learned only recently, to my considerable surprise, that the grand old man was still alive and made his home less than two miles from mine. Never as big a name as, say, Puccini, he had been a younger contemporary of his and well spoken of in his time. Of course, his music was rarely played nowadays—he had never had the common touch—but once in a while an adventurous impresario revived one of his all-but-forgotten operas or concertos (much in the same way that Busoni is occasionally resurrected). For decades, he had been living quietly in the suburbs, sustained by his royalties and a small annuity, writing his memoirs, composing special little things for private performances—string quartets and the like.

"Yes," he was saying, "the Hunchback of the Opera. That's what they called him—behind his back. His name was Benedetto Rinaldi."

"The great baritone," I said.

"Yes—how did you know? I thought no one nowadays . . ."

I said quickly, "When I was a boy, I used to visit my grandfather. He had an old-fashioned gramophone with an enormous horn. And a pile of scratchy, one-sided records. *Cohen on the Telephone,* also Caruso, Galli-Curci, Lehmann, McCormack, Chaliapin. And Rinaldi. Singing Valentin's aria from *Faust.*"

"It was a role he never sang, never could sing, on the stage," said del Medico.

"Why not?"

"For the same reason he could not sing Di Luna, Germont, Boccanegra, Amonasro, Escamillo, and a great many others. Those characters are kings, noblemen, warriors, matadors, and so on—imposing figures, requiring a commanding physical presence. And Rinaldi was a pitifully deformed hunchback."

"He could have played Rigoletto," I pointed out.

"He did. And Tonio in *Pagliacci.* He played both roles, many times. Beautifully, feelingly. As Rigoletto, the phrase *Solo, difforme, povero,* became especially poignant on his lips; and as Tonio, his high point was not the flashy Prologue—which he sang superbly—but that little arietta the lovelorn cripple sings to Nedda: *So ben che difforme, contorto son io.* But how many hunchback roles are there, after all?"

"There's Alberich in the *Ring* . . ."

"Rinaldi was no Wagnerian, and his German was atrocious."

"Frustrating," I said.

"Tragic. Poor Rinaldi was a far more pathetic figure than Rigo-

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letto or Tonio. That soaring voice caged in that bent body. And so, since so many roles were denied him, he decided to create a role he would deny others. He would commission an opera with a great role in it for him, and he would allow no other to sing it.

"The legend is that he went to Puccini—which is chronologically possible because Puccini was still very much alive and active at the time—but I happen to know that it was a less illustrious composer he approached: me.

"I was in Milan. He came to me with a libretto under his arm, a thick thing of many pages, all in longhand, bound with silk cord. He had written it himself, drawing freely upon Victor Hugo. *Il Gobbo*, it was called: *The Hunchback.*

"The twisted little man came straight to the point, speaking in that rich voice that one could actually *feel* vibrating the eardrum. 'Name any figure, maestro,' he said, 'and it is yours.' I told him I was very busy with other commitments (which was not entirely a lie), and he said, 'Promise me only that you will read this. If, after having done so, you can resist it, I will not press the matter further.' His confidence both annoyed and intrigued me, so I made the promise. He left the libretto with me, and, that evening, I read it.

"It was quite good. Of course, the basic story and characters were all in Hugo's great novel, *Notre Dame de Paris,* but Rinaldi had done a quite competent job of scaling things down to the limitations of the operatic stage, providing plenty of theatrically effective scenes and situations. All this, mind you, was several years before the same story was filmed for the first time, with Lon Chaney. As for his verses, they were adequate—not great poetry, but *cantabile*: singable. Needless to say, he had written himself a great role in Quasimodo. But it was not merely a one-man show—I would not have been interested in that—it was a very effective drama, with other good roles, Esmeralda, Jehan, Phoebus, Gringoire; and great opportunities for music: the scene in the bell tower, the scene in the torture chamber, the chorus of beggars, Esmeralda's dance . . .

"In short, Rinaldi's confidence was justified. I could *not* resist it. I got in touch with him the next day and told him I would do it."

"Yes," I said quietly. "You told him you would do it."

"What's that, Mr. Popowcer?"

"But you did not do it, *signore.* You took that poor cripple's money—worse, you allowed him to raise his hopes—and then you betrayed him!"

Del Medico's voice trembled. "Wh . . . who are you?"

I rose slowly from my chair and

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advanced toward him. "Can you not guess?" I said.

"No . . . it's impossible . . . *you can't be!*"

And then *he* told *me* something that stopped me in my tracks, and made the blood seem to jell in my veins.

THE PERILS OF POPOWCER

Chapter One: *Licked Before You Start*

Sonya Gorchenkov laughed triumphantly at my predicament. I was hooked up, buck naked, to a polygraph machine. That's right—a lie detector, but nobody gave a damn if I lied or leveled or clammed up. The polygraph needle reacted to every fluctuation of my blood pressure, heartbeat, pulse, respiration and perspiration. The slightest excitement of my senses, the merest upsurge of my emotions, and the polygraph would, in turn, activate a syringe that would empty a pint of cyanide into my veins. My only hope was to remain totally calm.

Sonya approached me slowly, tantalizingly. I muttered to myself, "Don't lose your cool, Popowcer." Sonya wet her lovely lips and bestowed a light kiss upon my

MEMO

TO: THE PUBLISHER
FROM: THE AUTHOR
SUBJECT: GORDON W. POPOWCER

Sorry, pal, but it looks like this Popowcer character just doesn't want to shape up. I've started four yarns about him, and each time I couldn't get past the first chapter. Now, about that advance you laid on me. I'm not exactly in a position to pay it back right now, but as soon as I return from the Bahamas, I'll make it up to you by starting a super new story about a terrific character named Jacksonville Florida, Jack for short. He's got a glass eye which is really a miniature laser gun, and a prosthetic right hand that looks like the McCoy but is made of stainless steel and can chop through a Honduras-wood door a foot thick. His arch enemy is the gorgeous but half-human daughter of . . . never mind, all this and much, much more will be revealed in the gripping pages of Five Foot Two, Eyes of Goo, which you'll be seeing in a few weeks. Well, the first chapter of it, anyway. Ciao, buddy. Hang loose.

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COLD WATER

by Isaac Asimov

ABOUT HALF A YEAR AGO (AS I WRITE THIS), I WAS HURRYING through the wintriness of New York City. There was no snow on the ground, but it was cold and I was hastening for haven. As I was crossing the street, my foot came down upon a manhole cover, and a fraction of a second later I had made hard and full-length contact with the ground.

It was the hardest fall I had ever taken, and my first thought, as I lay there, was one of regret, for it felt as though I had broken my left tibia, and in all my thirty-plus years I had never before broken a bone. I ought to have lain there and waited for help, but I had to struggle to my feet for two reasons:

For one thing, I was hoping desperately the bone was not broken, and if I could get to my feet it wouldn't be. Secondly, I wanted to find out why I had fallen since I am usually reasonably sure-footed.

I found I could stand. My left leg was banged up below the knee but the bone was intact, even though my suit (my *best* suit) was not. I further found (more in anger than in sorrow) that the manhole cover was frosted over with a thin layer of slippery ice. What had laid me low was the fact that the ice was quite transparent and that without close inspection, the manhole cover seemed bare and safe.

I had to hobble onward, at that moment, toward my hotel room, which was four infinitely long blocks away, and there was no time to muse on what had happened and make an article out of it. By now, though, the bitterness of the time has been somewhat assuaged, and I am ready. So here, O Gentle Reader, is the result—

To the ancients, one of the remarkable things about ice, perhaps the

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most remarkable, was the very property that had caused my near disaster—its transparency. To the Greeks, ice was "krystallos," from "kryos" meaning "frost," so the first strong impression seems to have been left by its manner of formation.

Once that was established, however, another property supervened, and the word came to be more significant for the connotation of transparency than of cold. After all, anything at all could be cold, but in ancient times few objects were known that were at the same time solid but not opaque.

It followed, then, that when pieces of quartz were discovered, and found to be transparent, they were called "krystallos," too, and were considered (at first) to be a form of ice that had been subjected to such intense cold as to have attained permanent solidity and an inability ever to melt again.

Then the word achieved still another change of connotation. One interesting fact about transparent quartz was its surprising regularity in shape. It had plane faces that met to form clearly defined angles and edges. Consequently, "krystallos" came to mean any solid with such a regular geometry. From this came our modern word "crystal."

Nevertheless, the older meaning of transparency persists in vestigial fashion. One still hears of the "crystalline spheres" which held the planets in the old Ptolemaic cosmology. This was not because they consisted of solid crystals; heavens, no. It was because they were perfectly transparent so they could not be seen.

And in modern times, the fortune-teller, gazing mystically into a glass sphere, is pretending to see something in her "crystal ball." This is not because the sphere is crystalline in the modern sense, for glass happens to be one of the very few common solids that is *not* crystalline (and, therefore, not truly solid), but because it is transparent.

And yet, none of that really represents the true wonder of ice. It may seem to have wonders enough. Its mere existence as "hard water" may seem amazing and paradoxical enough to the life-long inhabitants of tropic climes; and its coldness and transparency may be of interest, but all that is really nothing.

Consider instead something that is often remarked on; to the point, in fact, where it becomes something of a cliché. Have you never heard a statement such as this one: "Like an iceberg, nine-tenths of the significance of the remark was hidden"?

Like an iceberg!

Being a non-traveller, I have never seen a real iceberg, but if I were

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on a ship and one hove into view (at, I hope, a safe distance), I am sure that the passengers, crowding against the rail to see it, would say to one another, "Just imagine, Mabel (or Harry), nine-tenths of that iceberg is under water."

Then I would say, "That's not surprising, ladies and gentlemen. The surprising thing is that one-tenth of that iceberg is above water." Naturally, that would mean I would start getting those queer looks that would indicate once again (oh, how many times!) how much of a nut I appear to be to my beloved fellow-creatures.

But it's true—

In general, the density of any substance increases as temperature goes down. The lower the temperature, the more slowly the atoms or molecules of a gas move; the less forcefully they bounce off each other; and the closer they can crowd to each other. When the kinetic energy of the gas molecules is insufficient to overcome the attractive forces between the molecules,* the gas liquefies.

In liquids, the molecules are in virtual contact, but they have enough energy to slip and slide past each other freely. They also vibrate and keep each other at greater distances than would be the case if all were absolutely motionless. As the temperature drops, the vibrations decrease in force and amplitude, and the molecules settle a bit closer together. The density continues to increase.

Eventually, the energy of vibration isn't enough to keep the molecules slipping and sliding. They settle into a fixed position and the substance solidifies. The settling is more compact than is possible (usually) in the liquid form, but there is still vibration about the fixed position. As the temperature continues to drop, the vibrations continue to die down until they are reduced to a minimum at the temperature of absolute zero (—273.1° C.) It is then that density is at a maximum.

To summarize—as a general rule, there is an increase in density with decrease in temperature. There is a sudden sharp increase in density when a gas becomes a liquid** and another, but lesser, sharp increase when a liquid becomes a solid. This means that the solid form of a substance, being denser than the liquid form of that same substance, will not float in the liquid form.

As an example, liquid hydrogen has a density of about 0.071 grams per cubic centimeter, but solid hydrogen has a density of about 0.086 grams per cubic centimeter. If a cubic centimeter of solid hydrogen were completely immersed in liquid hydrogen, it would still weigh

*See THE THALASSOGENS, December 1970, and HOT WATER, January 1971.
**Except at the "critical temperature," something which need not concern us now.

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0.015 grams and would be pulled downward by gravity. Sinking slowly (against the resistance of the liquid hydrogen) but definitely, it would eventually reach the bottom of the container; or the bottom of the ocean, if there were that much liquid hydrogen.

(You might suspect that the solid hydrogen would melt on the way downward, but not if the ocean of liquid hydrogen were at its freezing point—and we'll suppose it is.)

In the same way, solid iron would sink downward through an ocean of liquid iron; solid mercury through liquid mercury; solid sodium chloride through liquid sodium chloride and so on. This is so general a situation that if you took a thousand solids at random, you would be very likely to find that in each case the solid form would sink through the liquid form and you would be tempted to make that a universal rule.

—But you can't, for there are exceptions.

And of these, by far the most important one is water.

At 100° C. (water's boiling point under ordinary conditions), water is as un-dense as it can be and still remain liquid. Its density then is about 0.958 grams per cubic centimeter. As the temperature drops the density rises: 0.965 at 90° C., 0.985 at still lower temperatures, and so on until at 4° C., it is 1.000 grams per cubic centimeter.

To put it another way, a single gram of water has a volume of 1.043 cubic centimeters at 100° C., but contracts to a volume of 1.000 cubic centimeters at 4° C.

Judging from what is true of other substances, we would have every right to expect that this increase in density and decrease in volume would continue as the temperature dropped below 4° C. It does *not*!

The temperature of 4° C.* represents a point of maximum density for liquid water. As the temperature drops below that, the density starts to decrease again (very slightly, to be sure) and by the time one reaches 0° C., the density is 0.9999 grams per cubic centimeter, so that a gram of water takes up 1.0001 cubic centimeters. The difference in density at 0° C. as compared with that at 4° C. is trifling, but it is in the "wrong" direction, and that makes it crucial.

At 0° C. water freezes if further heat is withdrawn, and by all we learn from other solidifications we would expect a sharp increase of density. We would be wrong! There is a sharp *decrease* in density.

Whereas water at 0° C. has, as I said, a density of 0.9999 grams per cubic centimeter, it freezes into ice at 0° C. with a density of only about 0.92 grams per cubic centimeter.

*3.98° C., *to be more accurate.*

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If a cubic centimeter of ice is completely immersed in water, with both at a temperature of 0° C., then the weight of the ice is —0.08 grams, and there is, so to speak, a negative gravitational effect upon it. It therefore rises to the surface of the water. The rise continues till only enough of it is submerged to displace its own weight (as measured in air) of the denser liquid water. Since a cubic centimeter of ice at 0° C. weighs 0.92 grams and it takes only 0.92 cubic centimeters of water at 0° C. to weigh 0.92 grams, it turns out that when the ice is floating, 92 percent of its substance is below water and 8 percent is above.

What we would ordinarily expect, judging from almost all other solids immersed in their own liquid form is that 100 percent of the ice would be submerged and 0 percent exposed. It follows, then, as I said earlier, that the surprising thing is not that so much of an iceberg is invisible; but that so much of it (or, indeed, any of it at all) is exposed.

Well, why is that?

Let's begin with ice. In ordinary ice, each water molecule has four other molecules surrounding it with great precision of orientation. The hydrogen atom of each water molecule is pointed in the direction of the oxygen atom of a neighbor, and this orientation is maintained through the small electrostatic attraction involved in the hydrogen bonds (as described in last month's article).

The hydrogen bond is weak and does not suffice to draw the molecules very close together. The molecules remain unusually far apart, therefore, and if a scale model is built of the molecular structure of ice, it is seen that there are enough spaces between the molecules to make up a very finely ordered array of "holes." Nothing visible, you understand, for the holes are only about an atom or so in diameter.

Still, this makes ice less dense than it would be if there were a closer array of molecules.

As the temperature of the ice rises, its molecules vibrate and move still farther apart so that its density falls, reaching a minimum of the aforementioned 0.92 grams per cubic centimeters at 0° C. At that temperature of 0° C., however, the molecular vibration has reached the point where it just balances the attractive forces between the molecules. If further heat is added, the molecules can break free and can begin to slip and slide past each other. In doing so, some fall into the holes.

As ice melts, then, the tendency to decrease the density through increased vibrational energy is countered and more than countered by the disappearance of the holes. For that reason, liquid water is eight percent denser at 0° C. than solid water is.

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Even in water at 0° C., however, the loose molecular arrangement in ice hasn't utterly vanished. As the temperature rises still higher, there is still a slow disappearance of the last few lingering holes, and it is not till a temperature of 4° C. is reached that so few of them are left that they can no longer exert a dominating effect on the density change. At temperatures higher than 4° C., the energy of molecular vibration increases and density decreases steadily as it "ought" to do.

The importance of this density anomaly in water simply can't be exaggerated.[6] Consider what happens to a moderately sized lake, for instance, during a cold winter.

The temperature of the water gradually drops from its mild warmth of the summer. Naturally, it is the water at the surface that cools first, becomes denser, and sinks, forcing up the warmer water at the bottom, so that it can, in turn, cool and sink. In this way the entire body of water cools, and would cool all the way to 0° C., if the density continued to increase steadily as temperature dropped.

As it is, though, when a temperature of 4° C. is reached, a further cooling of the surface water makes it slightly less dense! It does *not* sink, but floats on the warmer water below. The surface water drops in temperature all the way to 0° C., but heat leaves the lower depths only slowly and those depths remain somewhat warmer than 0° C.

It is the water at the surface, then, that experiences freezing, and the ice, being less dense than water, remains floating. If the cold weather continues long enough, the entire layer of surface water freezes and forms a solid coating of ice that may become thick and strong indeed (to the satisfaction of ice-skaters).

But ice is a good insulator of heat, and the thicker it is, the more effective an insulator it is. As it thickens, the deeper layers of water (still liquid) lose heat through the ice to the air above more and more slowly; and more and more slowly does the ice layer thicken further. In short, in any winter that is likely to occur on Earth, a sizable lake will never freeze solidly all the way to the bottom. This means that lifeforms in it can survive through the winter.

What's more, when the warm weather returns, it is the surface ice that receives the brunt of the sun's heat. It melts and the liquid water beneath is at once exposed, so that the lake quickly becomes liquid throughout once more.

What would happen, though, if water were like other substances? In cooling, there would be a continual sinking of cooler water all the way down to 0° C., so that the entire body of the lake would be at that

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temperature eventually. It would have a tendency to freeze at every point, and any ice that formed near the surface of the lake would sink at once if there were still liquid below it. A winter that under present circumstances would only suffice to form a thick scum of ice on a lake would be enough to freeze that same lake solid, top to bottom, if water were like other substances.

Then, when warm weather came, the surface of the frozen lake would melt, but the water that formed would insulate the deeper layers of ice from the Sun's heat. The thicker the layer of liquid water, the more slowly the Sun's heat would penetrate to the ice below and the more slowly would the deeper ice melt. Through an ordinary summer such as we experience on Earth, a solidly frozen lake would never melt all through. Most of it would remain permanently frozen.

The same would hold true for rivers and for the polar oceans. If water were suddenly to change its density characteristics, each winter would see further ice form and sink to the ocean abyss to remain permanently frozen thereafter. Eventually, all of Earth would be a mass of ice-bound land, with a thin layer of water on the surface of the tropic ocean.

Even though such an Earth would be at the distance from the Sun it now is, and would receive the amount of Solar energy it now does, it would be a frigid world and life as we know it would not have formed. It follows then that life depends on the hydrogen bond not merely for the reasons I outlined last month, but because of the loose structure it gives ice.

There's another way to break down the holes in ice besides raising the temperature. Why not simply squeeze the ice together under pressure? To be sure, it takes enormous pressures to squeeze out the holes to the point where ice is as dense as water. (When water is allowed to fill a sealed container tightly and then made to freeze, it exerts an outward pressure equal to the pressure it would take to compress ice to the density of water—and the container breaks.)

Still, high pressures can be produced in the laboratory. About 1900, a German physicist, Gustav Tammann, began to make use of such high pressures, and beginning in 1912, an American physicist, Percy W. Bridgman, carried the matter much further.

In this way, it was found that there were many forms of ice.

In any solid there is an orderly arrangement of molecules and there is always the possibility of a variety of different arrangements under different conditions. Some arrangements are more compact than others and these would be favored by high pressures and low temperatures.

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Thus, under ordinary temperatures and pressures, ordinary ice (which we can call Ice I) is the only variety that can exist. As the pressure is increased, however, two other forms are found, Ice II at temperatures below —35° C. and Ice III at temperatures between —35° C. and —20° C.

If the pressure is raised still further, Ice V, is formed. (There is no Ice IV; it was reported but proved to be a case of mistaken observation and was dropped, but not before Ice V had been reported.)

If the pressure is raised still further, Ice VI and Ice VII are formed. Whereas all other forms of ice exist only at 0° C. and below, Ice VI and Ice VII can exist at temperatures above 0° C., though only at enormous pressures.

In fact, at a pressure of 20,000 kilograms per square centimeter (one and a half million times the pressure of the atmosphere), Ice VII will exist at temperatures above 100° C., the boiling point of liquid water under ordinary conditions.

All these high-pressure forms of ice are denser than liquid water, as you would expect, for the holes have been squeezed out of them. Indeed, of all known forms of ice, only Ice I, the ordinary variety, is less dense than liquid water.

It would follow that if any of the forms of ice other than Ice I could form in the oceans, they would sink to the bottom and gradually accumulate.

In one of his excellent novels, CAT'S CRADLE, Kurt Vonnegut hypothesized a mythical "Ice IX" which could exist at the ocean bottoms and which would form spontaneously if only some small quantity existed as a "seed." The hero had such a small piece, and, of course, it got into the ocean to bring about the final catastrophe.

Is there really a chance of that? No. Any form of ice but Ice I can only exist at enormous pressures. Even the least high-pressure ices (Ice II and Ice III) can exist only at pressures more than two thousand times that of the atmosphere. If such pressures could be attained at the bottom of the ocean (they can't), a further requirement would be that the temperature be well below —20° C. (it isn't).

You can see, further, that no form of ice other than Ice I could exist in someone's pocket. If any other ice were formed and the high pressure required to form it were removed, the ice would instantly expand to Ice I with explosive violence.

That still leaves one thing to discuss. Though solid forms of a substance can (and often do) exist in a variety of crystalline forms, liquid

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and gaseous forms do not. In liquids and gases there is not, generally speaking, any orderly array of molecules, and one does not find varieties of disorder.

But in 1965, a Soviet scientist, B. V. Deryagin, studied liquid water in very thin capillary tubes and found some of it to possess most unusual properties. For one thing its density was 1.4 times that to be expected of ordinary water. Its boiling point was extraordinarily high, and it could be heated up to 500° C. before ceasing to be liquid. It could be cooled down to —40° C. before turning into a glassy solid.

The report was largely disbelieved in the west, where there is almost automatic skepticism toward any unusual finding that emerges outside the charmed circle of nations prominent in 19th Century science.

However, when Americans repeated Deryagin's work, they found, much to their own surprise, that they got the same results and could even see droplets of the anomalous form of liquid water—droplets so small they could be made out only under a microscope.

What was behind this?

Water molecules, while slipping and sliding around each other, do tend to take up the hydrogen bond orientation, as in ice. This happens over very small volumes and for very brief periods, but it is enough to make liquid water behave as though it consisted of submicroscopic particles of ice that form and un-form with super-speed.

The "ice" never forms over a volume large enough and for a time long enough to make the holes significant and cause water to be as undense as ice, but it does keep the water molecules far enough apart to allow hydrogen bonds to form and un-form. Liquid water is therefore less dense than it might be.

Suppose, though, that pressure is placed on water in such a way that molecules are forced closer together while in the hydrogen-bond orientation. With neighboring molecules unusually close, the hydrogen bond would be much stronger than ordinary and would, indeed, approach an ordinary chemical bond in strength. Molecule after molecule would fall into place and, thanks to the unusually strong hydrogen-bond attractions, they would make up a kind of giant molecule built up out of the small water-molecule units.

When small units build up a giant molecule in this fashion, the small units are said to "polymerize" and the giant molecule is a "polymer." The new form of water was therefore spoken of as "polymerized water" or, for short, "polywater."

In polywater, the molecules are in orderly array, something as in ice, but in much more compact fashion, and certainly without the holes.

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Not only does this compact array of water molecules produce a substance considerably more dense than ice, but considerably more dense than ordinary liquid water as well.

What's more, because the molecules are held more tightly together, it takes a much higher temperature than 100° C. to tear them apart and make polywater boil. It also takes a much lower temperature than 0° C. to force the molecules apart into the less compact array of ordinary ice. Other unusual properties of polywater are also easily explained on the basis of the compact array of molecules.

Apparently, polywater does not form under ordinary increases in pressure, but does form in the constricted volume of tiny capillary tubes. Biologists at once began to wonder whether within the constricted volume of tissue cells, polywater also formed; and whether some of the properties of life could not be most easily explained in terms of polywater.

I wish I could end the matter here, with this glamorous discovery and the still more glamorous speculation, but I can't. The trouble is that many chemists remain skeptical of the whole business.

It is possible, after all, that investigators have been misled by the chance of solution of the glass from the tubes in which the polywater was being studied. If it were not pure liquid water they were studying but tiny volumes of glass solution, all bets were off.

Indeed, one chemist recently prepared a solution of silicic acid (something which could form when water is in contact with glass) and reported it to possess the very properties of polywater.

So it may be that polywater is a false alarm, after all.

Special Fritz Leiber Issue

We still have a supply of the Special Leiber issue featuring "Ship of Shadows," which won the Hugo award as best novella at the 28th World Science Fiction Convention. The issue (July 1969) also includes a profile by Judith Merril, a bibliography and a sample of Fritz Leiber's poetry. Cover is by Ed Emsh. $1.00 from Mercury Press, Inc., P.O. Box 56, Cornwall, Conn. 06753.

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Leo P. Kelley ("Harvest," March 1970; "The Travelin' Man," September 1970) has been a steady, if infrequent, contributor to F&SF during the past several years; and we'll do all we can to beef up the quantity, for Mr. Kelley gets better and better with each appearance, without repeating himself. His last story was about population control; this one concerns, well, sin control. It is an uncommonly fresh and warm and humorous treatment of a theme which, in sf, too often degenerates into a moral harangue.

SAM

by Leo P. Kelley

YAWNING, FATHER MATTHEW Ryan began to put on his vestments for the first Mass of the morning. The alb. The cincture—*Lord, bind my loins . . .* Ah, no need, Lord, he thought. Not these lean sixty-year-old loins of mine. Some years ago, yes. But now my juices have dried up and the volcano of my blood is sound asleep. For me a pretty girl is merely a delight to look at now—no temptation at all.

A firm but genteel knock on the sacristy door. And then another.

"Yes? Who is it?"

The unmarried Malone sisters, shriveled from the heat of their imagined sins, sidled into the sacristy, all lacy and sly. "Good morning, Father, and God bless you," they bleated together, a two-toned choir.

"What is it, ladies?" Couldn't they wait until after Mass? Was their spiritual crisis so severe that it must be dealt with before six o'clock on a chilly Sunday morning?

"It's that Sam Bailey," said Miss Marlene.

"That reprobate," added Miss Aileen.

"What's old Sam been up to now?" Father Ryan asked, slipping his chasuble over his bald head.

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He smelled fire and brimstone. Sam may well be Saint Gabriel's sacristan, he thought, but these witches will burn him if they can.

"He's a devil," said Miss Aileen.

"From outer space," said Miss Marlene. "You remember, Father, the night he suddenly showed up in Little Falls last year? The same night the flying saucer landed out on Carter's Meadow?"

"There was no saucer," Father Ryan said, calmly covering his chalice.

"It was in the paper," protested Miss Aileen.

"Big as life," added her sister. "Pictures and all."

"Saint Elmo's Fire," Father Ryan said. "Aurora borealis."

"And he's not even a Catholic," said Miss Marlene.

Father Ryan frowned. "Sam's a good man. He just won't act his age, that's his only trouble. He thinks he's twenty years old instead of fifty."

"Lena Carlisle," said Miss Aileen with a superior sniff. "We saw him take her home from Beau's Bar and Grill last night."

"You two were there?" Father Ryan exclaimed, raising his gray eyebrows and pretending profound shock.

"Oh, no!" Miss Aileen replied. "We were out taking the late night air. But we saw what we saw!" She folded her hands and demanded Sam's dismissal. "Saint Gabriel's," she went on, "should have one of its own to look after it."

Miss Marlene said, "Pat Fahey and his wife Mary—lovely couple—chased him right out of their house night before last. And only last week, Denny Maclean threw him out of the firehouse for interfering in the poker game."

"Sam does seem to get himself in a peck of trouble," Father Ryan said, knowing it was true. Ever since Sam had appeared in Little Falls last year, he had managed to get himself in the middle of almost every brawl and brouhaha staged by the good citizens of the small town. "You can't condemn a man for that though. It may not be his fault."

"Well!" exclaimed Miss Marlene, giving Father Ryan the look she usually reserved for tardy Sunday School children.

"Well, I never!" exclaimed Miss Aileen.

Father Ryan called out to Pete Casello, the altar boy, as the ladies left the sacristy in a righteous huff, convinced that their pastor must have signed a pact with Satan (their private name for Sam Bailey).

"Let's go, Pete," Father Ryan said. "We can't keep God waiting."

Pete stepped in front of the priest, folded his hands, bowed his head, and out they went into the sanctuary where the two tapers flickered and peace was a fact.

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Father Ryan mounted the altar steps, placed his chalice in front of the tabernacle, and opened the huge Missal to the proper page. As he started down the steps again, the sound of Sam's rough voice singing outside the church shattered the candlelit silence.

"Roll me over in the clover, roll me over, lay me down and do it again!"

Father Ryan caught the I-told-you-so looks on the faces of the Malone sisters seated in the first pew. When they were sure that he had seen their icy indictment (of himself, of Sam, of sin—all in one glance), they piously lowered their eyes to their prayer books.

"Oh, roll me over in the clover . . . !"

Father Ryan bowed his head at the foot of the steps. "Et introibo ad altare Dei." The bishop's order, after all, had said the use of the vernacular was optional. And Father Ryan considered himself too old a dog to learn new tricks.

Pete responded, "Ad Deum qui laetificat juventutem meum."

Father Ryan would go unto the altar of God.

"To God who giveth joy to my youth," in Pete's words.

". . . roll me over, lay me down and do it again!"

At last Sam fell silent. The Mass proceeded.

"Credo in unum Deum . . ."

And, "Pater noster qui es in coeli . . ."

And finally, as always, "Ite missa est."

The Malone sisters closed their prayer books—*snap, snick*—and swooped up to the altar railing to light votive candles to guard them against flying saucer invasions and shamelessly sinful sacristans. Father Ryan, proceeded by Pete, made his way out of the sanctuary and back to the dim sacristy.

Sam Bailey was there, vigorously polishing a brass doorknob and singing softly to himself. *"How you going to keep 'em down on the farm after they've seen Parreeeee!"*

Father Ryan suppressed a grin and tried to look stern. "That hymn you were singing outside a little while ago, Sam. Hardly suitable for morning Mass."

"Now, Matt, don't take on so. You know you can drown me out with all that Latin mumbo jumbo of yours any day in the week. Besides which, I didn't think you could hear me."

Father Ryan dismissed Pete and began to remove his vestments.

Sam said, "Well, how'd it go this morning? Did you help those Malone girls sneak through the pearly gates?"

"They came to see me this morning," Father Ryan said. "They want you to get back in your flying saucer and go back wherever it is you came from. Or else."

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Sam stopped his polishing, straightened, and glanced speculatively at Father Ryan. And then he smiled. "Well, if they can believe in angels and devils, I guess they can believe in flying saucers."

"Don't blaspheme," Father Ryan said without anger. Was it blasphemy? He wasn't sure.

Sam went back to his polishing.

"They also accused you of Lena Carlisle, Sam."

"Lena's a fine port in a storm, Matt. Getting on in years a bit, she is, but still fine."

"The weather was fair and clear last night. Not a storm in sight."

Sam winked. "Now, Matt, is it that you don't know the heart has its own weather? Its own uneasy climate?"

"I know," Father Ryan said somewhat sadly. "Every priest does." He looked up at his friend. "What's this I hear about Pat and Mary Fahey chasing you out of their house night before last?"

"The Misses Malone again?"

Father Ryan nodded, grinned.

"I just happened to be passing by the Fahey house and heard them hollering and hooting inside, so I just stepped in to see if I could referee. Before long, they were after me instead of each other. Pat came at me with a butcher knife, he did."

"And the poker game at the fire-house?"

Sam sighed. "Denny Maclean had an extra ace stuck in his anklet. Harry Bolinsky spotted it and they started at each other hot and heavy. I agreed with Harry about Denny being a cheat. Then Mac Maguire accused me of maligning the name of a good God-fearing man. Mac claimed Denny Maclean was as honest as the day was long and as good a man as God ever put down here in this vale of tears. Before I knew what had happened, Mac and Harry had thrown me out on my—right on my ear. After which they all went back to being bosom buddies and me to being *persona non grata* at the firehouse."

"A word of advice, Sam—"

"Save it for the Malone sisters, Matt."

Father Ryan persisted. "It's about Lena Carlisle. Her husband—her common-law husband, Zack—got out of Keane County prison last week. Before you came to Little Falls last year, Zack Carlisle attacked a man he thought was paving too close attention to Lena. That's what landed him in the county prison on a charge of aggravated assault. Now he'll be coming back and—"

"Lena told me about Zack. 'Mean as they make 'em,' was the way she put it." He paused and chuckled. "I never did tumble a woman who talked as much as that Lena does, I swear."

Father Ryan breathed a quick prayer. "Sam, I don't know why

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you and I get along so well. I don't know why I like you as much as I do."

"It's simple," Sam said. "You have an alliance with the Devil, same as I do."

"I do not have—"

"If Beelzebub didn't exist, you'd be out of a job, Matt, and you know it. At least out of the one you've got. You'd probably be managing a supermarket somewhere with a pencil stuck behind your ear and your fingers smelling of pinched fruit." Sam put an arm around his friend and walked him to the sacristy door. "Better get something to eat, Matt. Drinking wine on an empty stomach is a bad habit. It'll ruin your liver for sure."

As Father Ryan made his slow way to the rectory, Sam's laughter followed him. To Father Ryan it sounded less like profane merriment at his expense than just plain down-home humor.

That night, as snow dashed down from the dark January sky, Father Ryan sat reading his office in the rectory parlor. The phone rang twice before he heard it. When he did, he got up and answered it. He listened in shocked silence to Lena Carlisle's anguished voice on the other end of the line.

". . . and Zack came home an hour ago, Father, and he grabbed Sam and . . ."

"Sam Bailey? Sam was there with you?"

Her voice lowered. "Well, we were having us a little talk, Father. And a couple of beers. But—about Zack. He's got a knife!"

"Where are you calling from, Lena?"

"I slipped out the back door and came over here to Mrs. Aberswift's to call you. You could talk to him, Father. He'd listen to you, Zack would."

Father Ryan wasn't so sure. Every Saturday afternoon when he sat in the hot darkness of the confessional booth, it seemed to him that sin was getting worse, if anything. It seemed to him that he could preach every Sunday for the next million years and people would go on—well, go on being people. It seemed to him that nobody listened to him, hadn't for years.

"Father, are you there? Will you come over and talk to Zack?"

"I'll come, Lena. Now, don't you go back there. You know what happened last time."

"Father, I feel terrible about this. Besides you see—" She drew a dry breath.

"Lena? Are you all right?"

"You see, Father, it's me that Zack wants to cut with that knife of his. It's me he hates. It's not really my gentlemen friends at all. It's *me!*"

Father Ryan tried to talk over

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the sad sound of her sobbing, and at last he succeeded. She promised him she wouldn't move from the safety of Mrs. Aberswift's house.

He hung up, started out, remembered his overcoat, came back and struggled into it, went out and got into his dusty old Dodge and drove off under the eyes of the stars. He drove for fifteen minutes, made a wrong turn on Spruce Street, doubled back, and at last pulled up in front of the Carlisle house on New Hope Street. He got out, crossed himself while cursing his lack of courage, and made his way up the path to the front door. He pounded on it in what he hoped was a commanding manner.

At first, there was only silence inside the lighted house.

And then Zack's voice yelled, "If you think you can take me back to that hellhole of a prison—well, you'll have to plug me full of holes first, you fuzz bastards!"

Father Ryan shuddered, perhaps because of the coldness of the night. "Zack Carlisle! Open the door! It's Father Ryan from Saint Gabriel's."

More silence. More shivering. And then the door opened an inch. Zack's heavy face with several days growth of beard maning it peered out. His eyes were wild and his lips were wet. An animal, Father Ryan thought and then promptly chastised himself for his lack of charity. It wasn't an animal. It was Zack Carlisle. "Zack, let me in. I want to talk to you."

"Go to hell," came the blunt response. Zack started to shut the door, but Father Ryan stuck his foot in it as he had learned to do when he was selling magazine subscriptions door to door before entering the seminary.

"Where's Sam Bailey?" he asked Zack, once he had managed to shoulder his way inside.

"Well, he ain't dead yet if that's what you mean. But he will be pretty soon." A snicker. "You come to say the holy words over his corpse?" Zack had been drinking. The whiskey fired his cheeks and reeked on his breath.

"Sam!" Father Ryan yelled, feeling real fear for the first time in his life.

"In here, Matt!" Sam yelled from the kitchen. "He's got me tied to the sink!"

"Get out of my way, Zack," Father Ryan ordered and strode forward. To his surprise and genuine relief, Zack grinned and stepped out of his way. Father Ryan found Sam with his back against the sink and his hands pulled up behind him and tied tightly to the two faucets. He went over to him, reached out . . .

"Don't touch him!" It was Zack standing in the doorway.

As Father Ryan turned around, Zack took the switchblade knife out of his pocket. He sprung the blade and gestured at Father Ryan

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with it. "This'll all be over pretty quick. Sit yourself down, Father, and start practicing your weasel words." He moved menacingly toward Sam, who glared at him.

Father Ryan sat down. What good now were all his years in the seminary, the countless rosaries told, the Masses said, the solitary penances performed? Nothing in his life had prepared him for this moment, for this confrontation with a man who might soon become a murderer.

Zack touched Sam's throat with the tip of his blade. "This here old fox can't stay away from the chicken coop when the farmer's away. Now I admit that Lena is a plump and tasty hen to find among the straw and eggs, sure enough. But the way I figure it, you got to kill foxes to save your chickens."

At that moment, the kitchen door flew open and a flurry of flannel robe and blue mules burst into the kitchen. "You leave him be, Zack!" Lena yelled and began to pummel Zack's chest.

He flung her aside easily and she fell against Father Ryan, who helped her sit down. "Father!" she cried. "*Help* him!"

Father Ryan didn't know whether she referred to Sam or to Zack. But he did know it didn't matter. They both needed help. "Zack, let's be reasonable. I'm sure no harm was done. Sam was just—"

"You bet your ass he was!"

"Matt," Sam muttered, "get Lena out of here."

Lena shook her head. She looked at Zack. "Don't hurt him, please. Just because he was nice to me, you don't have to hurt him."

Zack shouted an obscenity and spun around again to face Sam. Perhaps he hadn't meant to do it. Perhaps he had lost his balance. But the blade of his knife plunged into Sam's chest, and Sam's blood soaked through his clothes within seconds. He fell forward gasping, his head hanging down, his hands straining at the lengths of clothesline with which Zack had bound him to the faucets.

"Father!" Lena screamed.

Zack was standing with his back to them, staring at Sam in surprise.

Father Ryan turned to find that Lena had gotten to her feet and seized the iron handle used to lift the heavy lids from the coal stove. She was holding it out to him. He took it from her, raised it, and brought it down against the back of Zack's skull. The terrible sound of the iron smashing flesh and then bone caused Father Ryan's spine to sag. Zack fell to the floor and lay there motionless.

"Jesus, Mary and Joseph!" Father Ryan whispered, looking down at the bloody weapon in his hand. He dropped it beside Zack's unconscious body.

"Call the police," he told Lena

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in a weak voice. Why hadn't he told her to do that when she had first called him? Had he felt a certain pride that she had turned to him instead, believing him to be a wise and clever man, a man who would surely know how to handle the enraged Zack? As Lena ran for the phone in the living room, he hurried over to Sam. He reached out with one hand to support his friend. With the other he began to untie the cords that bound his hands. Minutes later, he eased Sam to the floor and then noticed that his own hands were red with Sam's blood. He stared helplessly at them and then at Sam as Lena came back and announced that the police were on their way.

He spent the night waiting for word of the results of the emergency surgery they were performing on Sam. At last the doctor appeared and said they would just have to wait and see. It was touch and go. He went back to Saint Gabriel's, said Mass, and then returned in the afternoon to the hospital to see Sam, who had regained consciousness. He talked to the doctor again. The doctor said that a man Sam's age—well, if he were a few years younger . . . Younger. Father Ryan knew that the doctor had no cure for the disease of inevitably advancing age, complicated in Sam's case by two inches of steel that had violated his heart.

Later, as he sat beside Sam's bed in the intensive-care room, he said, "They've got Zack locked up in the jail in the basement of the courthouse pending trial. Lena's doing fine, considering."

The briefest of smiles from Sam.

"I had to open the church myself this morning. Couldn't find the keys for the longest time. I'll be glad when you're back to do all the dirty work, Sam."

"How's everything in town now that I'm out of circulation?" Sam asked.

"Well, there are the usual problems."

"Problems, Matt?" Sam eased himself up on his pillow.

"It seems that Pat Fahey blacked Mary's eyes—both of them—and then she broke his nose with their cuckoo clock. Pete Casello got in a fight with one of the other altar boys after Mass this morning. Denny Maclean pushed Mac Maguire down the steps of the firehouse last night because Mac had accused him of cheating during their poker game. The same old story." Father Ryan frowned thoughtfully. No, it wasn't the same old story at all. It was a slightly different story. Now what—? He thought about it for a moment. Always before, it had been Sam who had been the one in all the trouble. Sam was the one who had been thrown out of the firehouse. Sam was the one

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who had been attacked by both Pat and Mary Fahey. Sam was the one who had taken the knife wound from Zack Carlisle instead of Lena. *Instead* of Lena!

Sam said, "Well, Matt, judging by the expression on your face, I'd say that you've got it all figured out finally."

Father Ryan started to speak, but the idea he was going to voice was ridiculous, impossible!

"No," Sam said, as if Father Ryan had actually spoken, "it's true. I was a sort of lightning rod, you might say. For the Faheys, the boys at the firehouse—all of them."

Father Ryan stared at the man he thought he knew but now began to suspect he didn't really know at all. "Sam, the Malone sisters said—"

"They were right. I landed in Carter's Meadow, just like they said."

"Then there really *was* a flying saucer?"

"There was—it was mine. I came and did what I had been trained to do."

"Sam—" The name suddenly tasted strange to Father Ryan. "What—why—?"

A flicker of an indulgent smile momentarily erased the pain on Sam's face. "Where I come from, we have—well, castes. Or orders, as you'd call them. We do good works. Some of us like me are members of a penitent order. We are assigned as missionaries to minister to some of the more backward—" He cleared his throat with some difficulty. "What we do is, we draw other people's anger to ourselves to keep— We sort of defuse them, you could say, to keep them from hurting one another."

"A missionary," Father Ryan murmured, thinking of martyrs. "But Sam—the whiskey, the women—*Lena*!"

Sam laughed, a wet bubbly sound. "Sin changes from time to time, Matt. And from place to place. Now bedding a girl or draining a bottle now and then have nothing at all to do with sin where I come from."

"Where you come from?" Father Ryan repeated, dazed.

"Don't you worry about Saint Gabriel's, Matt," Sam said. "Somebody'll be along to help you out."

"Oh, you'll be back in a week, Sam," Father Ryan said quickly. "Any day now. The doctor told me—"

"Mendacity, Matt, is a sin for you."

Father Ryan lowered his eyes.

"Like I said, somebody'll be along, Matt. Listen, give me your hand. It's time to say—give me your hand, Matt."

They shook hands gently and Father Ryan quickly excused himself and hurried from the room, away from—away.

He was reading his office in the

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rectory parlor that night when the hospital called to say that Sam had died suddenly. He put down the phone and stood there for a long moment feeling terribly alone. Well, he told himself, life had to go on. He would remember Sam tomorrow morning at Mass.

The phone rang again.

It was Miss Marlene Malone. "There's been another saucer sighting, Father!" she yelped. "An hour ago—out in Carter's Meadow, just like the last time when that awful Sam—"

On the Malone extension, Miss Aileen cried, "Father, you'd best come out right this minute and exorcise the area so that—!"

Father Ryan hung up on the Malone sisters and sat down to wait, knowing quite well what he was waiting for, believing in miracles as he always had.

Less than fifteen minutes later, there was a knock on the front door of the rectory. He got up and opened it to confront the young man standing on the porch and smiling at him.

"I heard you were in need of a sacristan," the young man said.

"Experience?" Father Ryan inquired.

"Some."

"References?"

"Sam Bailey."

"What's your name?"

"Sam," the young man answered. "Sam Ralston."

And then it struck Father Ryan. *Sam.* Perhaps it was a title—a designation translated into English. Like *Father.* Or *Monsignor.* "Come in," he said, taking the young man by the arm and leading him into the rectory. "I'm very glad you're—uh, here. I sure can use some help, God knows. Oh, by the way, my name is Father Matthew Ryan."

"I know," the young man said. "Sam told me before he died."

"Call me Matt," Father Ryan said. "We might just as well be informal since we'll be working together from now on."

He said a silent prayer for the Misses Malone in the days to come as he shook hands with Sam.

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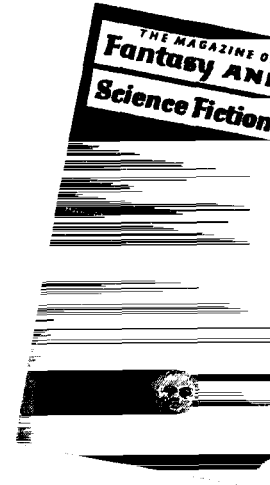

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